



THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION
DEVOTED TO BORDER HISTORY

Issued Weekly By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 85.

Price, Five Cents.

BUFFALO BILL'S SINGLE-HANDED ROUND-UP

OR
NIPPING OUTLAWRY IN THE BUD



BY THE AUTHOR OF "BUFFALO BILL"

BUFFALO BILL RAPIDLY SECURED THE OUTLAWS, BY PASSING HIS LARIAT AROUND THEIR WRISTS, FASTENING THEM SECURELY TO EACH OTHER.



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BUFFALO BILL'S SINGLE-HANDED GAME;

OR,

Nipping Outlawry in the Bud.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

CHAPTER I.

THE DEATH-ROLL.

"Men, that means death at a rope's end. I am a hunted man, and am here for gold, now, or death."

"There is a price on my head, I do not fear to tell you, and the man who can get it is welcome to it."

"Which one of you now wishes to play the coward and fears to follow my lead?"

"It is death or a fortune—who will take the chances?"

The words were uttered in a tone of mingled desperation and defiance, and the speaker cast his eyes over the group of nearly a dozen men, as he spoke.

He stood with his back to a cliff, rising some forty feet above him, and as smooth as a wall as it ran along on either side from him.

Before him, and facing him as they stood in a row, some ten feet distant, were as hard a lot of citizens of the genus desperado as one could meet even in that wild land.

They were of the type that have left a black page in the early history of the mighty West, but who fade away before the advancing tread of civilization.

Bearded, long-haired, sunburned men, with faces which evil deeds had indelibly stamped, armed thoroughly for deadly work, roughly clad and with restless, piercing eyes peering out from under the broad brim of their slouch hats, they were the very ones to be led into deviltry by one who appealed to them as had the speaker who so defiantly had told them that upon his head a price was set.

The same might be said of most of those who heard him, if not all.

His bold words found an echo in their hearts, and they uttered a cheer.

The person they regarded with admiration was small of stature, slender, dressed in a suit that spoke of the East, rather than of the border, but whose belt of arms was worn with the air of one who well knew how to use them.

He wore a sombrero, top boots, and his face was bearded, his hair long.

"There are two of us in this plot to get gold, and the other is the leader, not I; but he deserves the title of captain, if arrant deviltry, daring and nerve are worth any-

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thing in figuring up a record out here, while upoh his head dead or alive, there are prices set that count high.

"He will lead, and our duty will be to follow; and, mark my words, he will enrich us all, for the stages, the gold trains, and all else in which there is pay dirt will be our games."

"I know some of you; others I do not know; but you were picked out as men to tie to for any deed."

"You shall have the best horses, weapons, and outfit which can be secured, and your pay will be good, for the risks of death on the gallows are great."

"Now, step forward one by one, and sign the death-roll, as you pledged yourselves to do when you were selected for the work in hand and were told to come here and meet me."

He was standing by the side of a large bowlder with a flat surface, and as he spoke he took from his pocket a white roll of paper, deeply bordered with black.

There was a pile of gold pieces on the paper, and a skull and crossbones, while the writing on it was in red ink.

"I will read this to you, men, so that you will know just what you sign; but remember, there is no backing out, now that you know the secret."

"Listen!" and with this he read

"I, _____, hereby pledge my life to the League of Mounted Gold Miners, to obey all laws and accept all consequences."

"It is short and to the point, but it means either life and fortune or death to the signer."

"Are you ready to sign?"

His eyes swept over the faces before him, when one of the men stepped forward and wrote down his name, with the pen handed to him, and in red ink.

A second did the same, and others followed, writing with more or less ease, and all but two had signed.

Those two remained in line, making no movement to come forward.

"I am waiting for you two men."

Neither moved, or uttered a word.

"What does this mean?" and the man's eyes glared upon them.

"Say, cap, I hain't a-goin' ter write down my death-sentence," answered one of the men.

"Me, too, though I'm willing ter join ther outfit," added the other.

"Do you refuse to sign this death-roll?" asked the leader, calmly.

"That's what I does."

"I hain't a-signin' no papers."

The others all looked at them in wonder.

What would the result be, for they had all pledged themselves to sign the death-roll?

Then all eyes turned upon the leader.

He spoke in a tone that meant danger, as he said:

"When each man was selected to join this league, and told to come here, he knew he was taking his life in his hands."

"Do I understand that you refuse to sign this death-roll?"

"Yes, I won't do it."

"Me, too."

"Men, you have signed, and you are members of the League of Mounted Gold Miners."

He addressed the crowd now.

All answered in the affirmative. Then followed the words:

"We must not be betrayed. The grave alone keeps secrets. You two men must die!"

Before a word could be said, a move made, there came two shots, almost like one, and the men who had refused to sign the death-roll dropped their length upon the ground, a bullet in the brain of each.

CHAPTER II.

THE DEADLY LASSO.

The two shots singing a deathknell to as many men, fairly paralyzed the rest of the band.

It showed them that they had indeed placed themselves under the rule of one who held human life at his caprice, and who had thus taught them how thoroughly inflexible he was and intended to be.

"Men, they were traitors, or intended to be, and so I will punish all such, for I represent one who will protect himself and those loyal to him."

"I hold your signatures to this death-roll, and though I know that not one of them is your right name, still they hold you as you are known, and—"

He paused, for the men were beginning to rouse from the almost stupor they had felt at his sudden and murderous act.

They were looking at each other questioningly—were muttering, and it seemed as though a storm was brewing then and there, for they felt their power, eight to one, and a common thought came to each that they would not be at the mercy of a leader who would kill for the slightest provocation.

The life of none of them was safe, and their compact with a man so relentless must end then and there.

Such was the feeling of one and all, and their glances were from one to the other, to find a leader, one bold enough to denounce the murderer, and be the one to defy him.

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But, as they looked, as the speaker paused, seeing trouble coming, and nerving himself to meet it, there suddenly came a dark object flying downward from the cliff over their heads, and what appeared to be a large snake encircled about the head of the one who held the fatal death-roll in his hands. There was a tightening of the slender line, a twang as it was drawn taut, and then upward was dragged a human form, held in a deadly grip, struggling, choking, yet borne upward steadily and surely until he swung in midair, an appalling sight to those below.

Speechless, bereft of the power of motion, so sudden, so quickly, for it had not taken five seconds of time, had the startling deed been done, that the men had only seen the form of their leader dragged from the earth by unseen hands, and there left hanging upon their appalled sight.

But they were quickly awakened from their daze by seeing a man appear on the very edge of the cliff, and while revolvers were leveled upon him they heard the threatening words:

"The man that moves, I kill!

"Surrender, or take the consequences!"

"Boys, that's Buffalo Bill!"

"Hands up, for he's got us cornered, and that means certain death!"

One of the men had recognized the tall form, the stern and handsome face of the one above them on the cliff.

They had wanted a leader but a moment before.

They had intended to rebel against the merciless man into whose power they had placed themselves in signing that death-roll.

Now that man swung in midair, gasping for breath, a warning most terrible.

Their hands, with one exception, went upward.

That exception knew best what surrender meant to him. It was to chance a bullet, or later certainly die on the gallows.

He made one spring for liberty and dropped dead.

"Riddle every man that moves, men!" was the stern command from the tall man on the cliff.

There were fringes of pines and bushes along the edge of the cliff, which might hide half a hundred men, as the outlaws thought, and men think quickly under such circumstances.

"We surrender!

"Don't let your men kill us, Buffalo Bill!" called out the man who had recognized the great scout.

"See that you obey orders, for my pards are only too anxious to wipe you out," came from above.

"See that you stand as you are," and the scout gave an order to whoever were on the cliff with him, and then continued:

"I will lower this man. He is not dead yet."

The scout disappeared, and immediately the form swinging in the air was lowered to the ground.

"Keep your eyes on them, men, and drop the man that moves," the scout called out. With that he grasped the lariat and swung himself over the edge of the cliff.

Another moment and he stood in the presence of the outlaw band.

CHAPTER III.

THE SCOUT'S BOLD PLAY.

Defiant and commanding was Buffalo Bill, as he stood there under the shadow of the cliff, facing the seven men whom he had captured.

There lay the two bodies whom the bullets of the leader had laid low, and a few paces distant was the form of the man who had attempted to dash away.

At the scout's feet was the leader, the lariat just loosened from about his neck by the scout.

"This man is not dead, I can revive him; but, first, to secure you. Remember, a move of resistance is the signal for your death."

The words were calmly uttered, and not one of the men moved, but all remained with uplifted hands.

"Right about face, all of you!" The men obeyed with alacrity. Then their captor stepped forward and each man was disarmed, their weapons being placed upon the rock which had been used as a table for the signing of the death-roll.

"Now, each man clasp his hands behind his back!" was next ordered.

This was done, and, taking a lasso hanging at the belt of the man who had recognized him, Buffalo Bill skillfully and quickly bound the hands of each outlaw behind his back, and thus had the men secured, and held together by the line going from one to the other.

Leaving them with their backs turned to the cliff, the scout bent over the man his lariat had dragged up into the air.

The face was black, the neck discolored, the eyes set, but the breast heaved convulsively.

With the air of one who knew just what to do, Buffalo Bill began the work of resuscitation.

The shirt was opened, the belt taken off, the throat and hands rubbed hard, and water from the scout's canteen poured into the face and upon the head.

Then a swallow of liquor from a small flask the man had in his pocket was placed between his lips.

It seemed for a while doubtful as to what the result would be, but, at last, the breast heaved more and more convulsively, and life began to control the limp form once more.

"It seems cruel to bring him back to life again to die

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upon the gallows; but I am no hangman; and only did what I did to capture him," avowed the scout, speaking aloud, more to himself than to the prisoners.

A few more minutes and the man, so near death a short while before, arose, suddenly, to a sitting posture, rubbed his throat, and, as his eyes fell upon the men before him, but with their backs turned toward him, their hands bound, he asked, huskily:

"What does this mean?"

"Simply that you and your gang are my prisoners, Bob Brass," said the scout, who stood just behind the man.

One quick glance, and the returning color fled from the face again, as the lips uttered the words:

"Buffalo Bill!"

"Yes, if you like the name better than William F. Cody," was the reply.

"I would rather it was the devil."

"You came very near having your wish, Bob Brass, for I had a hard time to fetch you back from the confines of hades."

"Yes, I remember now, how I was dragged upward by a rope about my neck. You did that, then."

"Yes. My lasso it was!"

"And you brought me back to life?"

"After hard work, yes."

"To hang me?"

"I suppose that will be the result, from what I know of you, Bob Brass."

"And these men?"

"Are my prisoners."

"Are you alone?"

"If you will glance upward among the bushes fringing the edge of that cliff you will be answered."

The man did glance upward, but his eyes fell upon the lasso still hanging over the cliff edge, and with a shudder he cared to see no more.

After a moment he said:

"I suppose I owe you my life."

"Don't mention it."

"If Buffalo Bill hadn't chipped in and won ther game, we would have just filled you with lead, for we didn't like your murder of those two men."

This was uttered by the man who had first recognized Buffalo Bill.

"Then it seems I have to twice thank you for my life, as these cowards would have killed me had not you appeared upon the scene!"

"Again I say, don't mention it; but are you able to ride now?"

"Where?"

"Where I please to take you."

"Ah, yes, I forgot—to be hanged. Yes, I am able to go, for resistance will be in vain."

"It will be, indeed."

"Hold out your hands."

The man obeyed, and Buffalo Bill snapped upon them a pair of steel manacles.

He had his last man thus secure.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DISCOVERY.

Buffalo Bill now gathered up the weapons of the outlaws, rolled them in the handsome serape of the leader, and said:

"Where are your horses?"

"Down yonder in that meadow," answered the leader.

"We will go there. You lead the way."

From one to the other the men passed questioning looks. They evidently were growing suspicious and restless.

Buffalo Bill was not one to let anything escape his notice in such emergencies. He realized that, unassisted and bound as they were, the men suspected that he was entirely alone, and intended to throw themselves upon him in a desperate effort to bear him downward, prevent the use of his revolvers, and to escape.

One, two, might be killed, but the scout could do no more with the whole crowd upon him.

Glancing upward, he called out:

"Ho, Jack! I will follow the cliff down to the valley. You and several more of the men do the same, to keep your eyes on these fellows, should they give me trouble. Send others of the men down the lasso, and let them bury these bodies."

Without waiting for reply, Buffalo Bill, speaking to the leader, continued:

"Now lead the way, keeping close along this cliff, to where the horses are."

The critical moment had passed, the coolness and command of the scout had cowed the ruffians, and they saw that resistance was in vain.

The men, linked by the lariat, followed in close order.

With a vicious sullenness the cavalcade moved off along the base of the cliff.

Buffalo Bill followed, and did not even have a revolver drawn.

They soon came to a bit of meadow where there was a break in the wall of rocks.

Through this dashed a stream, and along the rugged bank a trail led to the cliff above.

In the meadow, staked out, with saddles on, but bridles hung upon the horn, were eleven horses, all fine animals, the scout saw, with admiring glance, and, halting the prisoners close under the cliff, he went himself and brought up the horses. Then each man was carefully retied with

the stake ropes, and the lariat removed, so that they could mount. One by one they were made to do this, and were then secured by the same stake rope to their saddles.

When all were thus mounted and secured, the lariat was run through the bit of each bridle, so that, when the horses filed off, the head of one just touched the haunches of the animal preceding.

At last, mounting one of the extra horses and taking the two extra ones in lead, the scout led the way up the rugged bank to the plateau above.

A ride of half a mile brought him out of some timber upon the plateau, and there, to the utter amazement and bitter chagrin of the prisoners, they beheld a superb horse standing a few paces back from the edge of the cliff, while to his saddle-horn was attached a lariat, the other end of which fell over the precipice out of sight.

There stood the noble and faithful animal, as his master had left him, holding the lariat as he had been left to do, while at the edge of the cliff, to keep the line from cutting on the rock, was a tin plate, so bent as to hold there.

The scout smiled as he saw the chagrin and anger depicted on the faces of his prisoners.

They eagerly looked up and down the cliff, but not a man was in sight; the fringe of bushes along the edge had concealed no one!

The scout had boldly and cleverly done his daring work without aid or comrade.

He had accomplished what no other man would have dared to attempt!

It looked like madness for one man to attempt the capture of nine desperadoes, but his complete triumph had shown that there was method in his madness.

He had been watching them from above, while they signed that fatal death-roll; he had laid his plan of action, had bent the tin plate to fit the sharp edge of the rock, had placed the well-trained horse facing the cliff to hold the strain on the lariat; then he had cast the deadly noose over the head of the leader, just in time to save him from his own band.

With giant strength, he had dragged the man upward, taken a turn around his saddle-horn, and thus held the struggling form, while, with revolvers ready, he had sprung to the cliff's rim, and cowed the men below, enforcing his command for non-resistance by a shot that ushered one soul into eternity.

The prisoners saw it all now at a glance.

They looked at each other, then at the scout, and, as one man, gave vent to their rage in one savage yell.

What that cry meant Buffalo Bill knew but too well; and, revolvers drawn, he drove the spurs deep into the flanks of the horse he rode, just in time to save being

swept off over the cliff's brink by the converging line of horsemen, who, at their leader's sign, moved around him in a curve.

CHAPTER V.

A DESPERATE RESOLVE.

Buffalo Bill had seen his danger at the moment he realized their intention, and instantly sinking the spurs into the horse he bestrode, his revolvers drawn, he escaped being caught in the swoop, and bounded cleverly by the last of the gathering line.

It was a narrow escape from a real deathtrap.

Passing the last man, the scout instantly halted and covered the men with his revolvers, amid their howls of disappointment and fury.

But these howls turned quickly to exclamations and cries of horror as the further one of the horsemen at the end of the closing line in the rush toppled over the cliff, and horse and rider went to their doom—the man uttering an appalling cry.

The other horses shrank backward just in time to save themselves from being pulled over, and their weight was thrown against that of the animal which had gone over, and thus held by the lariat around his neck, hung suspended several feet below the edge of the cliff, struggling wildly.

There, too, tied to his saddle, hung his rider, shrieking for aid, his face deathlike in its pallor, his eyes wildly staring in entreaty to be saved.

Buffalo Bill had instantly realized what had happened, and quickly seizing the lariat hanging over the cliff, and attached to his own horse, standing a few paces away, he rushed the animal to near the edge, gave a whirl of the coil, and caught the struggling, swaying brute about the body.

The scout dreaded lest the other lariat should soon give way, and thus he gave a double hold upon the swinging horse by this timely act.

Another lariat, taken from one of the outlaws' saddles, was cast over the head of the wildly-struggling horse, and made fast to the horn of the nearest saddle, while a shot from the scout's revolver sent a bullet through the brain of the brute that was choking to death, thus ending his dying frenzy and making the strain less severe upon the lines now holding him.

And securely was the outlaw bound in the saddle of the now dead horse, and swinging between life and death, crying for help.

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CHAPTER VI.

THE CRIME OF INGRATITUDE.

From the moment the end horse and his bound rider had gone over the cliff, to the time that Buffalo Bill had cast two separate lassoes to break the strain upon the one, and had shot the horse, to further lessen the tax upon the lines, had not consumed more than a minute.

Going, then, to his own horse, the scout had patted him affectionately and said:

"Stand firm, old pard, because my life depends upon you!"

Then he took up the bent tin plate, forced it beneath the lariat over the edge of the rock, and swung himself over upon the taut cord.

The eye of every outlaw was upon him. Especially was the gaze of the man bound to his saddle fastened upon his with appealing regard.

The outlaws could do nothing, bound as they were, and if their now nervous horses grew more restive all might be dragged over, they well knew, to death.

"I will aid you, for you did not bind me in my saddle."

It was Bob Brass who spoke, and he slipped out of his saddle as he spoke.

Instantly Buffalo Bill drew himself back upon the cliff, and, revolver in hand, he advanced upon the man.

"I had forgotten you, and I'll send a bullet into your heart if you dare move," he said, sternly.

"But I wish to help you save that man, for such appears to be your intention!"

"It is, as surely as it is my intention to kill you to save myself. You have a telltale face, Bob Brass, and twice I have read your purpose.

"You would have cut the lines and had me go down with that horse and man; or, failing in that, you would have forced the whole line of horses over to save yourself, for, though in irons, as you are, you are capable of doing much deviltry.

"Here, hold out your hands, for I have no time to lose."

The man sprang backward, as though to run, but with a bound Buffalo Bill was after him, and, hurling him to the ground with no gentle force, he tore off the silk scarf he wore, bound it quickly about his legs, and, forcing his hands downward, made the manacles fast about the feet, thus preventing him from moving.

This had taken a couple of minutes of time, and the outlaws were trying hard to soothe their horses, growing more and more restive.

With a word to the animals to soothe them, Buffalo Bill approached the edge of the cliff, and once more swung himself over, placing his feet upon the head of the now dead horse.

The scout was taking desperate chances, risking his life to save that of the outlaw, for, bound as he was, the

unfortunate man could do nothing to save himself, but swung from his saddle the very picture of despair and horror.

The men watched the brave scout with real admiration at his great pluck and humane nature.

If he had not cared to save a life, he could have cut the lines with his bowie and allowed horse and man to go down together.

But, slipping down until he reached the saddle-horn, Buffalo Bill took his knife and began to cut the thongs that held the man to his horse, saying as he did so :

"Catch a firm grip upon my belt, and thus hold on. Have you the strength and nerve to do so?"

"Yes, oh, yes! I can do it," answered the man, who, now that help was at hand, had regained his nerve.

"Now, I will free your hands, but for fear you may fall, I will make these reins fast about you and around my waist."

He cut off the bridle reins as he spoke, and suited the action to the words, and so, if one fell, the other must go also.

"Now, climb upward as I do."

"I will."

The eyes of the outlaws were upon the brave rescuer and their rescued comrade. Their horses were quivering with fear and scare, but safety seemed just at hand.

The scout's foot rested upon the head of the dead horse, and then he swung over upon his own lariat, held by his own splendid animal, that stood firm as a rock.

Not wishing to cut his own lariat, he had loosened it from about the body of the swinging horse, thus leaving but two cords holding the heavy weight of the animal and two men.

Swinging upon his own lariat now, he relieved the others of his weight, and said to the outlaw:

"Now, climb up quickly to the cliff, for the rocks are wearing the rope, I see."

The man obeyed by placing his feet upon the head of the horse and coming up level with Buffalo Bill.

The latter was just about to release the reins which held the man to him when, suddenly, the outlaw, putting out one hand, as though to get a grasp upon the line above, snatched the revolver from the scout's belt, and, quick as lightning, thrusting the muzzle hard against the body of his rescuer, pulled the trigger.

CHAPTER VII.

A STAMPEDE.

It was a close call, yet a miss is as good as a mile, it is said.

Never, however, had Buffalo Bill experienced a closer call in all of his adventurous life.

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It was just in this way:

Buffalo Bill had self-cocking revolvers, and when the outlaw drew the weapon from the belt of his daring rescuer, to commit the basest of crimes, that of deadly ingratitude, he thrust the revolver muzzle hard against the body of the scout.

Had the weapon exploded the bullet would have torn through the heart of Buffalo Bill, and the hero's career would then and there have ended; but as the fellow rose at the pull of the trigger, the end of the bridle rein around the body of the scout went beneath the trigger, and the blow fell, not upon the cap, but upon the leather.

The result was no explosion; the great scout was not doomed to thus die.

But he had realized his danger when too late to avoid it, though a man of iron nerve, quick action and presence of mind, he had prevented a second pull on that fatal trigger.

The outlaw was unnerved by his failure, and, expecting instant death, had let go his hold upon the rope with one hand and the revolver with the other. As he did this he received a stunning blow in the face from Buffalo Bill's fist.

But for the leather reins that bound him to Buffalo Bill, the ruffian would have gone down to his death. Instead, he swung there in midair, and the sudden weight was a hard strain upon Buffalo Bill.

Held by the leather under the hammer, the revolver never fell, so it was quickly released and returned to its holder by the scout.

Startled more by the movement of the men, the horses grew yet more nervous, and for a moment Buffalo Bill feared that all were coming over the cliff on top of him.

With a mighty exertion of strength he drew himself upward, reached the edge of the cliff and gained a footing there.

The outlaw, half dazed, half stunned, by fright, he quickly dragged after him.

A sweep of his knife severed the leather rein which bound the outlaw to him, and, as the horses were growing nearly wild now, in their nervousness, all except his own superb animal that yet stood firm as a rock, he leaned over and cut the two lariats supporting the swinging brute.

His own lariat, as has been said, was already free.

Backward staggered the line of linked horses, relieved of the weight, while, with a loud thud and crash, the dead beast struck the rocks below.

Springing to his feet, Buffalo Bill seized the outlaw and dragged him to where Bob Brass lay, quickly bound him again with the leather reins.

The line of horses having stampeded, he ran to his faithful animal, threw himself into his saddle and darted away in pursuit.

It was just as they were about to dash wildly down the rugged trail through the pass, with the plunging river upon one side of them, that he came up with the leading horse, grasped his rein and turned him aside from this new danger.

A cheer from the outlaws told how they appreciated their rescue, for, utterly powerless to check their horses, they one and all knew that certain death awaited them, should one of their frightened, half-maddened brutes stumble in that mad flight down the rough trail.

"It seems we are doomed to keep company, men," observed Buffalo Bill, as he brought the line of horses down to a walk and led them back toward the cliff.

"Buffalo Bill, I always heard you were kin to the devil, and now I know it," said one of the men with real admiration for the scout.

"Thanks for the compliment," was the quiet answer, and soon after Buffalo Bill halted the horses near where lay Bob Brass and the outlaw who had tried to show his gratitude for the scout's saving his life by killing the man who had risked his own to do so.

He had returned to perfect consciousness now, but had a bruise on his face where the scout had driven his fist.

"Pards, I thought if I kilt him I'd save all of yer," he said in a tone of apology as the outlaws were led up by Buffalo Bill.

"Fool, didn't you know that my weight would have pulled you off the rope, too, for you had the revolver in one hand?"

"Lordy! I never thought of that. It was a mighty narrow escape for me, I tell you, pards."

"And for me," dryly rejoined the scout.

Then he added:

"Bob Brass, I'll have you and that fellow mount now, and I'll see that you are all secure this time."

"Then I shall go over the cliff and get those bodies there, for they go with us, as I have never yet left a human being to be food for coyotes, if I could possibly avoid doing so."

"Let them alone, for they are nothing now," rudely answered Bob Brass.

"They are dead, hence sacred, at least in my eyes," was the stern response.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW DANGER.

Having made the two outlaws mount on horses, as both of them were of light weight, Buffalo Bill bound them securely beyond all chance of escape, and then led the three animals that had been ridden by the dead men up close to the cliff.

He fastened the batch of animals so they could not be

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started off by their bound riders, and then placing his own horse in position, went over the edge of the cliff on his lariat, as he had done before.

Taking the nearest body, he tied the end of his long lariat about it, and then climbed up to the top and over the cliff.

As a separate trip would have to be made in each case, it would be a long and tedious task to bring up the dead bodies.

Still he would not, as he had said, leave a human being to become a feast for coyotes and vultures.

A second time he went down to the scene of the triple tragedy, and two of the bodies were thus drawn upon the cliff.

A third trip Buffalo Bill prepared to make, but he hesitated on the edge, glanced at the outlaws sharply, as if suspecting some new attempt by them in his absence, if only to frighten his horse. Then he spoke:

"You and your gang, Bob Brass, are as hard a lot of villains as I ever saw, but I wish to say that if I hear a word or a chirp from any of you, I will come back and force into the mouth of each one of you a gag that will effectually silence the whole gang."

"I do not wish to be cruel, but patience ceases to be a virtue after a while, and if a gag does not silence you, a bullet will."

With this the scout slid over the cliff to get the third body.

Among the outlaws was the silence of death; not one of them dared speak, even in whispers.

Down the lariat went Buffalo Bill, and taking the last of the dead men, he secured the body to the end of his lariat, as had been the others.

Then he turned to reclimb the slender line to the cliff edge, forty-odd feet above.

In going up he had faced the wall of rock, aiding himself by rests here and there upon uneven places, by his feet.

This he found necessary in his last climb particularly, as his hands were now almost blistered, and even his iron-enduring frame could feel fatigue.

He had gone about a third of the distance, and had just taken his foot from a resting-place, to resume his climbing, when there came to his ears from below the startling words:

"Yes, you are Buffalo Bill, and are on my trail; but now I have you where I want you!"

That Buffalo Bill was both surprised and startled may be assumed.

He glanced upward, expecting to see a face peering over the cliff at him. His second glance was downward. That glance revealed all.

A man stood below whom he recognized as his deadly foe, and this foe was covering him with a revolver, as he hung there in midair.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DESERTER.

Swinging in the air over thirty feet from the ground, clinging to the slender lariat, with a foe standing below with a drawn revolver, the scout was certainly in the direst danger, from which there seemed no escape.

Had the nerve of the great plainsman failed him for an instant, he would have lost his life; but it did not fail.

In moments of great danger brave men think with wonderful rapidity, and act with promptness—just as Buffalo Bill did.

The glance at the man showed him to be the very one for whom he was then on the search.

He was a soldier, wore a corporal's stripes upon his arm, and was booted and spurred, being a cavalryman. A carbine swung at his back, a saber hung at his left side, and his belt held two revolvers, while a third was grasped in his hand and covered the scout.

The man's face was haggard, his beard was of a week's growth, and he looked like one who was suffering and desperate.

A week before he had killed a sergeant in his troop, and in making his escape had also shot down the sentinel over the corral where he went for his horse.

The whole force at the fort had been turned out in pursuit; but the corporal was an expert frontiersman, and both clever and cunning, so had eluded all pursuers.

The chase was kept up for several days, and then given up until Buffalo Bill rode into the fort, and the commandant had put him upon the track of the fugitive soldier.

It had been no easy work to pick up a cold trail, but the scout had done so, and was following it when his attention had been attracted by the sight of the men gathering at the cliff, evidently for some evil purpose.

Watching them from above, he had seen and heard just what their intention was, and, as has been seen, made the bold play to capture the outfit alone and single-handed.

No one knew better than he the almost desperate chances against him; but he was one whose courage impelled him to all risks.

The hard task the brave scout set himself to accomplish has been recorded, and just when success had crowned his efforts suddenly another danger threatened, and one from which there appeared to be no escape.

But his nerve was not undone, and he looked squarely down into the face of the soldier deserter, who, knowing

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that he was upon his track, or surmising as much, would naturally wish to kill him, as he then held him, to all appearances, at his mercy.

"Ho, Corporal Dave Strong! What in the world are you doing this far from the fort?" he called back, in the coolest of tones.

The corporal stared. Could it be that Buffalo Bill, who was off from the fort on a scout when he fled, had really not returned, so did not know of what had happened, and so was really not on his trail, was the thought that flashed through his mind.

"Why, I went off on a hunt and got lost, and I'm awful glad to meet you, Chief Cody," he answered, lowering his weapon.

"So you thought you'd scare me, eh? Well, you did scare me, I admit, for I am not in best fighting trim up here."

"I'll come down, for you see that dead man there, and there are more to tell you about, corporal, and mighty glad I am of your aid."

"Who is with you?" asked the corporal, suspiciously, while Buffalo Bill began to climb down the lariat, hand over hand.

"More of the same kind!" and as Buffalo Bill reached the ground he held out his hand to the corporal.

The latter grasped it, but asked again:

"Who is with you?"

"Eight live men and three dead ones, counting this man, and they are a hard lot from the Red Willow Mines."

"Ain't you afraid of them?"

"I've got them all tied to their horses, for I caught them napping."

"When did you leave the fort, and how was it you got lost?"

"I was just about to ask when you left."

"I went off on a scout two weeks ago."

This the corporal knew, but he did not know the scout had, meanwhile, returned and started off on his trail, so cleverly had he been misled.

Corporal Dave Strong was never a popular man at the fort, though an excellent soldier. He had been a scout before enlisting, and also a miner, and through all was an atrant gambler.

A man of herculean strength, a fine shot, superb hand with the sword, he was feared by his comrades and heartily disliked for his overbearing manner and high temper.

It was over a game of cards he had killed his sergeant, and when he had made his escape all knew that a very dangerous man was free, to work much harm, if he remained in that country and turned outlaw.

But the corporal owed his life on more than one occasion to Buffalo Bill, and now, believing that the scout

did not know his double crime and flight, he was anxious to give him the slip without killing him, when the opportunity offered for him to do so.

CHAPTER X.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

Buffalo Bill had played his card boldly and well, and must so play it to further his instant decision to capture the renegade, as his orders instructed—dead or alive.

But as he did not wish the man's life on his hands, he at once determined to use strategy and gain the corporal's confidence.

"I wish to tell you of my capture, corporal, and though I say so myself, I know you will think I have done well," he began his recital.

"I am out on a trail, as you know, and I camped back in the timber beyond this cliff for dinner, when, hearing a horse neigh in this direction, I came on foot to reconnoiter.

"I looked over the cliff and saw a man seated here, recognizing him as Bob Brass of one of the lower mining camps, and a gambler, though he had once been an Overland stage driver.

"I knew from his actions that he had come to keep an appointment, so I just determined to find out what it was all about."

"And you did so?"

"Oh, yes," and Buffalo Bill told the whole story as it happened, adding:

"Now, you can just understand how your joke to scare me made me feel for a minute or two; but I'm mighty glad I found you, for you can help me greatly, as I will take my prisoners to camp to-night a dozen miles from here, and push on to-morrow to the fort; but how did you manage to lose yourself, corporal?"

"I was detailed to accompany Captain Langley on a hunt, and you know what he is after is game."

"Yes, he is bound to have game if there is any to be found."

"Well, I got in chase of some deer, and lost my way."

"My horse went lame from a stone being hung in his shoe, and I have not been able to get it out, so here I am."

"Have you seen any cavalry, Chief Cody?"

"None."

"I guess the captain gave me up and returned to the fort, leaving me to follow, but I hope you have a good supply of rations, for I am about starved."

"I have plenty, but where is your horse?"

"A mile from here."

"I heard firing, so came to see what it meant, and who it was, thinking it must be Captain Langley's party."

"No, I did the firing, I guess. But come, we'll go up

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on the cliff, draw up this body after us, and we can then ride over to get your horse, for I have my tools along and can soon get the stone out of the hoof of your horse, and then he'll be all right."

"I guess I had better walk back and lead him to your camp."

"No, that will take too long."

"Then, too, you really look used up and must have something to eat right away."

The corporal had intended to give the scout the slip right then.

But it flashed upon him that with nothing to eat and a lame horse he must still be in a very bad way.

The words of Buffalo Bill decided him upon taking advantage of his lucky meeting with him.

He seemed to feel that luck was coming his way and he would play his cards well.

Believing Buffalo Bill wholly ignorant of his crime and escape, he would simply go up on the cliff with him, get something to eat, for the little food he had been able to bring with him had given out the day before, and go after his horse.

With the stone taken from where it had been fastened in the shoe his horse would be all right, though the corporal recalled that Buffalo Bill had the finest animals on the frontier for speed and endurance, barring none.

He could better himself surely by going with the scout to his camp, for unsuspected as he believed he was, he could plan to have all go as he wished it.

This decided upon, the scout took hold of the lariat and again went up to the top of the cliff.

Then he called down:

"Now, corporal, you come up, and we will then haul the body up."

The words sent a shudder to the hearts of Bob Brass and his comrades.

They had heard voices below, knew the scout had found some one, but when he called the word "corporal," they supposed there must be a party of soldiers there, and all hope of escaping from the scout, before he could take them to the fort, faded utterly away.

Weakened as he was, it was no easy task for the fugitive soldier to climb the lariat, but Buffalo Bill gave him a helping hand, when at the top, and he was drawn upon the cliff in safety.

CHAPTER XI.

BUFFALO BILL IN DANGER.

The two men having arrived safely on the cliff, while Corporal Dave Strong turned his eyes upon the outlaw prisoners, the scout began to draw up the body of the last of the three dead.

'As the corporal saw the men, he knew just who and what they were.'

In his career upon the border as stage driver, miner, scout and soldier, Dave Strong had become acquainted with many hard and strange characters.

He knew half the men who were now the prisoners of Buffalo Bill.

Knowing them, he was well aware that they were ready for any mischief, that they would commit crime without the slightest dread of remorse.

He could pick out some of the party whom he knew had done deeds that would have hanged them if the law's talons could have fallen upon them.

They did not know him as a murderer and a fugitive deserter.

They recognized him as one against whom no criminal charge had ever been made, and who, as a soldier, would only aid Buffalo Bill in keeping them from making their escape.

Had they known the red record he had won in the last few days, how gladly would they have hailed his coming.

Just what the corporal was doing there, unshaven and looking haggard and seedy, they could not guess.

The corporal looked them over, and said sternly, with an air of supreme disgust, too, at their wickedness:

"A nice pickle you have gotten yourselves into, men."

"Maybe yes, and maybe no, corporal," said Bob Brass, not knowing the soldier, but recognizing his rank by his stripes.

"We will leave them here until we return, for they will be safe," said Buffalo Bill, who leaped into his own saddle and told the soldier to take the animal that was to be kept for the last of the dead bodies drawn up on the cliff.

The soldier obeyed and followed the scout in the direction he had said he left his horse.

Riding down the rugged trail and crossing the stream, they found the animal, a large bay, staked out upon a little meadow of delicious grass.

The saddle and bridle lay in some willows near, and there was a smoldering fire, a tin cup, canteen, and a couple of blankets.

With the tools he always carried with him, Buffalo Bill quickly freed the horse from the stone in his hoof, and was glad to see that it had left no lameness.

Taking the horse in lead, they started back for the cliff, and found the outlaws just as they had been left.

It was growing late in the afternoon now, and Buffalo Bill was anxious to find a camping-place before dark.

He had been fortunate thus far beyond his most ardent expectations, for he had captured the outlaws, and if the corporal was not yet a prisoner, he at least had him within reach.

The bodies were therefore strapped upon the horses, and leaving the animals bearing them to be led by the corporal, Buffalo Bill took those bearing his prisoners in lead, and started upon his way.

"How far are you going to-night, Chief Cody?" asked the corporal, not caring to go on the back trail toward the fort, for fear of meeting a scouting party of soldiers.

"I know of a good and safe camp half a dozen miles from here we can reach before sunset, corporal, and it is well to be well located, as were we to meet a party of prowling miners, they might attempt a rescue of our prisoners, while Indians are also on the scene in small bands in this country."

"Yes, that's so," said the corporal, and he rode on in silence.

But his mind was painfully busy.

He could have shot Buffalo Bill in the back at any moment, and ended all suspense.

But that the scout seemed to feel he would not do, and trusted him.

The prisoners had all left their camps with only a day or two's rations, not expecting to be long away, and Red Willow settlement was all of forty miles from where they then were.

In another direction, nearly a hundred miles away, lay the fort, and in still another direction was a line of mining camps, located along the Overland stage trail, the nearest being fifty miles off.

To the northward was the Indian country, and a band of braves were liable to be met at any time.

Thinking matters over, the fugitive soldier, as he rode along, leading the horses bearing their ghastly burden, decided what the best course would be for him to pursue.

Arriving in camp, he would get a chance to talk with Bob Brass and one or two of the prisoners whom he knew, for his doing so, he thought, would certainly attract no suspicion upon him, as the scout did not, in his opinion, know he was a fugitive.

Then he would plan to set the prisoners free, Buffalo Bill would be made a prisoner, and then allowed to go his way to the fort on foot.

He did not wish to kill the scout unless they were forced to do so by his desperate resistance.

"Yes, all works my way, and to-night will tell the story," he said, as Buffalo Bill led the way to the halting-place for the night.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SOLDIER'S PLOT.

The responsibility resting upon him Buffalo Bill fully realized as he rode into the little clump of timber he had decided upon as his camp for the night.

He not only had his eight prisoners to look after, but the dead men to be unstrapped from the horses and placed apart; while he had the soldier fugitive to yet capture, as it were.

But he seemed not in the least uneasy, and led each horse to the spot where he intended to stake him out, in a meadow a few rods distant from the camp.

This was in a bend formed by a creek, deep and running swiftly, so that the one place to be guarded would be the entrance end of the little point.

"I will sleep at this end, leaving you among the prisoners, corporal," said Buffalo Bill.

"I am under your orders, sir," was the answer, but Buffalo Bill knew that he had done just what the soldier wanted.

At the same time he had pleased himself.

The horses placed, the corporal was set to work building a fire and preparing supper for all, while one by one the scout untied the prisoners from their saddles, and leading them into the timber, made them secure there.

It, of course, took some little time for each man, and purposely Buffalo Bill took Bob Brass first from his horse to the camp.

It was just as he had felt that it would be, for Corporal Strong at once found wood more plentiful near where the outlaw leader had been placed.

Buffalo Bill, of course, could not hear what passed between them, but he kept his eyes busy, and saw that the corporal hung near the prisoner until he came near with two others, for he decided to hasten his movements as much as possible.

"You are in a bad way, pard," said Corporal Strong, as he picked up wood near Bob Brass.

"I should think so," was the reply.

"Buffalo Bill is sure to get you to the fort."

"Perhaps."

"What do you mean?"

"I never give up hope while there is a chance for life."

"Do you see any?"

"Your pay as a corporal is not over a couple of hundred a year?"

"No."

"Well, we are all human, and if I were to give you a dozen times that sum in a lump, what would you say?"

"For your freedom only?"

"I am trading now for all."

"I will set you free for the sum you name, and leave it for you to get the others to match it if they wish to save their necks."

"They'll do it, for I'll answer for it."

"All right, I'll take the contract."

"How can you do it?"

"I know a way."

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"You have got the very devil to master in Buffalo Bill."

"I know that very well."

"Here he comes now."

"I will return this way when he goes back after other prisoners," and the soldier moved away with his arms full of wood.

He had already lighted his fire, and had put the provisions out for use, and as soon as Buffalo Bill went back for other prisoners he returned to where the outlaw leader and two of his men were.

"These men agree, and all will, so give us your plan while you can do so," said Bob Brass, hastily.

"There is no hurry, and I have another plan to propose."

"Name it."

"If I set you free I dare not go back to the fort."

"If it is known, no."

"Very well, that makes an outcast of me."

"Join us."

"For what work?"

"Robbing lone gold camps, holding up coaches, pony-riders, and wagon trains."

"A good business, but I serve under no man, and I'll tell you now I do not want your money, but will set you and your whole outfit free on one condition."

"What is that?"

"That you serve me."

"In what way?"

"I have decided to turn road agent myself, under certain conditions, and I will take you as my lieutenant and your men as my band, enlarging it by a few more enlistments, and if you agree to this I will set you free."

"If not?"

"Money can't buy your escape. I tell you that flatly."

"But I am only a lieutenant now, a sub-officer of the band."

"Who is the chief?"

"He will appear in good time when needed."

"And you only serve under him?"

"Yes."

"Well, I want you to serve me, for I will be your captain, and I can make money for all of us."

"But the chief will not submit."

"All right, he'll be a chief without a band."

"How so?"

"You will all hang."

"But we will pay you big money for our pardon."

"I am trading on one condition."

"That we serve you and desert our chief?"

"Yes; for you are now in a position where your chief cannot serve you, and he is a chief without any followers."

"This is a new deal, made as it were with dead men, for every mother's son of you will hang as you know."

"Buffalo Bill is coming back."

"Return when he goes after more men," and again Dave Strong, the deserter, walked back to the fire.

CHAPTER XIII.

UNDERHAND WORK.

Once more the scout approached with two of the men, and he seemed to be perfectly unconscious of anything going on against him in the way of a plot.

Completely fooled by Buffalo Bill's pretended innocence of his crime the corporal felt perfectly at his ease, and was working about the camp-fire when Buffalo Bill returned that way.

"I've been keeping my eye on those fellows, chief, for I didn't know whether you were making them all secure until you brought the balance up."

"That is right, corporal, for it is no easy task I have on my hands."

"I should say not, in fact call on me whenever I can serve you."

"I will."

The scout walked back after the other prisoners, and after putting more wood on the fire the corporal gathered the canteens and went to the stream for water.

But he found it convenient to get water near the prisoners, who were securely bound now hand and foot, and seated upon the ground in a row between two trees, the scout intending to run a lariat along and through the hands of each one, thus preventing any of them from leaving the spot.

Stepping upon the rock nearest the leader the corporal dipped a canteen into the stream to fill it and said:

"Well, there are five of you here now, so what is the verdict?"

"Your demand is that you be chief of the band?"

"Yes."

"Which it is to do duty as road agents, as I was intended by the unknown chief whose officer I am."

"It shall do duty as I deem best for my own and the interests of each member."

"For lawless deeds?"

"Certainly, for I know you are all outlaws, each one of you has committed crimes that would hang you, and if I unite your destiny with mine, I accept the consequences, and live or die with you."

"That sounds well."

"I am no coward," and Dave Strong filled a third canteen, continuing as he laid it on the bank and took up a fourth one:

"I know this country as no man, save Buffalo Bill, does. I have been stage driver, gold miner and scout, ending with soldier, which I now am, and the latter has fitted me to command men."

"I could take your money and deceive you, but I want none save that I earn, and together we can get rich."

"I ask, to save you all from the gallows, the right to be your chief, put my neck in the noose with yours."

"Do you refuse or do you accept my terms?"

"You talk square, and when the others are brought here and Buffalo Bill is not near, we will all talk it over and decide," said Bob Brass.

"Do so."

"But how are you to save us?"

"I'll find a means, never fear."

"Our band is known as the League of Mounted Gold Miners."

"A good name."

"We have all signed a death-roll, all save two, and I killed both of them, for we cannot trust our secret to those who are not of our band."

"You are right."

"Do you dare sign that death-roll?"

"Where is it?"

"Here in my pocket, along with a pen and red ink."

"Get them out, and sign it if you dare."

"All right."

"Bring the death-roll to me, signed with your name and army rank and regiment, and you shall have an answer."

The corporal swung the canteens about his shoulders, thrust his hand into the pocket of the outlaw and drew out the death-roll and the pen and ink.

Then he walked back to the fire and set diligently to work to prepare supper, while Buffalo Bill took two more of the gang to the camp, tied them securely and returned for the last two.

The corporal showed that among his accomplishments he possessed the art of knowing how to cook, for he sliced some bacon thin, cut some steaks from a haunch of venison the outlaws had with them, filled Buffalo Bill's coffee pot, and several of the tin cups with water to boil, and made up some dough for bread, while potatoes were put in the fire to roast, and onions sliced to add zest to the appetite.

Buffalo Bill always scouted with a well supplied provision bag, and to get supper for half a score hungry men, the corporal was drawing most liberally upon it.

In spite of his being busy at cooking, the corporal found time to return to the prisoners for a moment when the scout had placed all of them in line and run the lariat from tree to tree, passing it between the bonds above their ankles.

He asked the scout to look after the boiling coffee while he went for more water.

"Well, here is your death-roll, and I have signed it."

"Now for your answer," he said.

"We agree to your terms."

"You are wise."

"Now, how will you set us free?"

"There is but one way it can be done."

"How is that?"

"To kill Buffalo Bill."

CHAPTER XIV.

IN DEADLIEST PERIL.

Back to the camp-fire went the soldier, and found the man whom he had just said must die quietly cooking supper.

"The men are anxious for their supper, chief, so I will serve them now, as soon as you have helped yourself."

"You are the hungry one, corporal, so eat your supper and I will look after the prisoners."

"Oh, no, I've been nibbling as I cooked, so am all right."

"I will help you, then, and we will have our meal afterward."

The corporal did not wish to argue the point.

With a knowledge of what his intentions were, he was suspicious that the scout might suspect, and so he said:

"All right, sir."

"But could we not bring the men here in a body, and I keep them under cover of my carbine while they ate?"

"No; for I will take no chances."

"They would be wholly at our mercy."

"Perhaps."

"But with hands and feet untied, if they wished, though unarmed, they could give us a great deal of trouble, in fact would do so."

"No, we can carry them their supper, and they must excuse any shortcomings."

"All right, sir, I'll get the grub ready, but we might bring the leader and several of them here."

"No, for I know Bob Brass too well to take chances, corporal."

"Who is he, sir?"

"I'll tell you what I know of him, and it is enough to hang him."

"I don't doubt it."

"A man came out to Red Willow settlement, a handsome fellow and one who called himself a prospector."

"He found gold, lived in a comfortable cabin alone, and worked his find for all it was worth, and it was said that he got a great deal of gold."

"But one night he disappeared, his cabin was locked, and all thought he had been murdered."

"A month or two after the stage brought a stranger to the mines, and he had papers giving him full right, title, and all else to Rex Ridgeley's claim, for that was the handsome prospector's name."

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"This newcomer said that Ridgeley had gone East, and was rich, and had sold out his claim to him, and he had, as I said, the papers to prove it.

"He took possession of the cabin and the mine, and was known as Bob Brass, and from the day of his coming he has been known as a very dangerous man, though he called himself a tenderfoot.

"He has killed half a dozen men, one of them a soldier who was gambling with him, and a stranger arrived one day in search of him.

"He was shown the cabin of Bob Brass, and soon after shots were heard.

"The stranger was killed, and he was afterward found out to have been an officer of the law, who wanted him East for crimes committed there.

"Bob Brass soon after learned that news had been sent to the fort as to who and what he was, and he at once proclaimed himself a hunted man, and dared any one to earn the price upon his head.

"No one has gotten it up to date, but I am very sure that if I get him to the fort his career of crime will close, as will also be the case of the others whom he has picked for lawless work, and organized into a band which fortunately have not yet been able to begin their red record as outlaws.

"Now you know him, and his followers are not much better, so you see, Corporal Strong, it is most important that we get them in safety to the fort."

"Yes, I see," responded the corporal, and then he aided Buffalo Bill to carry the supper to the prisoners.

Buffalo Bill had told the story of the career of Bob Brass to note its effect upon the fugitive soldier.

He had already formed the idea that the fugitive corporal did not intend to leave the country.

Moneyless, as he was, a double murderer, knowing no other country, and a fugitive, he would naturally do as others had before him, become an outcast.

The scout realized that by a rescue of Bob Brass and his seven men he would gain their lifelong gratitude, and his rank as a corporal would give him a hold upon them as a leader.

Buffalo Bill appeared to read just what the plan of the fugitive soldier would be, a rescue of the prisoners and to join their band.

To do this he knew that he must be sacrificed.

Somehow he would not believe that the corporal would be the one to kill him, owing him his life, as he did, and so he was anxious to keep his eyes upon the prisoners.

The corporal had last gone to them, and it would have been easy to have severed the bonds of several with his knife, for Bob Brass had manacles upon his wrists and ankles as well.

So Buffalo Bill was anxious to go and face the ordeal at once, hence he aided in carrying the supper to the outlaws.

He could just see, by the fading light, that they were as he had left them, and he breathed more freely.

Then he built a small fire near, for them to see to eat their supper, he said, but in reality to be able to discover every movement made.

When they had been given their supper, and he served

them faithfully, he returned with the corporal to the large fire to eat their meal.

"Now, the corporal will kill him, unless he is playing us false," said Bob Brass to his men.

CHAPTER XV.

RESOLVED.

The little fire built by the scout revealed to him that the bonds of his prisoners were intact, and he felt more secure.

The corporal had not yet made any attempt to free them, though the scout felt sure that he had been arranging with them a plot to do so.

What that plot was Buffalo Bill did not know, but he was determined not to be caught napping.

To give an idea of security, he took off his belt of arms and laid them to one side, as he said, to eat his supper in comfort.

But he had already concealed a revolver in his breast pocket.

The corporal also threw off his heavy army belt, with its saber, revolver and cartridge box.

Together the two men sat eating supper and chatting pleasantly, and then Buffalo Bill said :

"Corporal, I will scrape up the dishes and spread the blankets for the prisoners, if you will water the horses and stake them in a fresh grazing ground."

"All right, sir," and the corporal, with no dread of a counterplot by Buffalo Bill, walked off and left his belt of arms and carbine lying where he had placed them.

Most expert in the handling of weapons, and glad at a chance so foolishly given him, Buffalo Bill, without attracting the attention of the prisoners, very quickly took the cartridges from the corporal's carbine and revolver.

Then he scraped up the tin plates, washed them and the tin cups, rinsed out the coffee pot, and walked over to where the prisoners were.

"I am sorry you have to be uncomfortable, men, but it cannot be helped.

"I will spread your blankets for you, and give you one to cover with, and you must make the best of it, for you well know I dare not release you," he said in a kindly tone.

"Why not release our feet, at least, and keep watch half the night over us yourself, the corporal keeping guard the other half?

"It would be more humane," said Bob Brass.

"Little humanity do you deserve, Bob Brass, and as it is you will not be as uncomfortable as you might, if guarded by others.

"No, I will do for you all that I dare do."

"That's precious little."

"From your own standpoint, perhaps, but I have eight men to watch."

"You have the corporal to help you; but I'd rather trust to your mercy than his."

"No doubt," and having spread the blankets for the men, Buffalo Bill was turning away when Bob Brass called out:

"Will you let the corporal bring us some water?"

"Oh, yes, you shall have all the water you want," and Buffalo Bill returned to the fire, got a couple of tin cups, and going to the stream, began to take water to the men.

It was evident that they were disappointed. They had hoped that the corporal would do this kindness for them.

The scout was determined that he should not.

"Please have the corporal bring us our saddles to put our heads on," said Bob Brass.

"All right," called out the scout, but he brought them himself, and this was another bitter disappointment to the prisoners.

Upon returning to the camp-fire, Buffalo Bill saw the corporal just appearing from the direction of the meadow.

The corporal had been anxious to give the best of care to the horses, and he had watered each one and staked them out in fresh feeding places.

"You'll be my horse when the sun rises again," he muttered, as he patted the horse of Buffalo Bill and gazed at him admiringly.

When he returned to the fire he asked:

"Are the prisoners all secure, Chief Cody?"

"Oh, yes, and I made them as comfortable as I could, poor fellows, for I always feel for one in misfortune."

"So it is said of you, sir," and the face of the fugitive soldier was a study.

There before him sat the man who had twice saved his life, and against whom he was plotting then in his heart.

He was planning to end his brilliant career as a borderman, and simply to save his own life, upon which he had so recently brought the stain of a double murder.

For a moment it seemed that the face of the corporal softened, and his eyes were lowered.

But only for an instant, for there came back to his countenance the same hard, cruel look it had worn before.

He knew that his own life would be the sacrifice if he did not kill Buffalo Bill.

He reasoned that if he spared Buffalo Bill, allowing him to return to the fort, in fact, he would lose his hold upon the band he now sought to become the leader of.

Then it flashed through his mind that Buffalo Bill alive would hunt him off the face of the earth.

The scout knew the country thoroughly, and once he set out to run down the Mounted Gold Miners he would do so.

Where they could elude others, Buffalo Bill they could not escape.

No, there was nothing for it but to kill Buffalo Bill.

"I must do it, though it is a cowardly deed," he muttered, as he leaned back against a tree, with his face in the shadow.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CALL TO DIE.

Buffalo Bill showed no indication in his face that he realized the workings of the deserter's brain.

He could hardly believe that the man he had served so well would really take his life, and felt that it was only his intention to free the prisoners and then let him go his way.

Still, with all his trust in human nature, he yet had protected himself to the extent of taking the cartridges from the weapons of the fugitive soldier, as he might from impulse do that which in calmer moments he would shrink from.

If driven to the wall to escape he might become dangerous.

As the two sat there, near the camp-fire, the scout was on the watch for any move of the soldier.

He had not yet determined just when he would make the arrest of the soldier.

Not caring to have more on his hands to look after than he already had for the night, he was anxious, if possible, to wait until the morning to make the arrest.

Still, he feared that the soldier would not allow him to wait, but force him to act sooner.

As they sat there in the light of the fire, the scout saw that the man kept his face hidden from him.

There was no doubt but that he was nervously himself to act, but just how or when Buffalo Bill could only conjecture.

As the soldier stretched out his hand and drew his belt of arms toward him the scout felt that the ordeal was upon him.

"I will have a look to see that the men are all safe, and then turn in," said the soldier.

"All right, corporal."

The corporal buckled his belt on and strolled away toward the prisoners.

Buffalo Bill had all their weapons near him, and his own trusty rifle was within reach, his belt of arms right at hand.

He knew that the corporal could not get the prisoners free before he reached the spot, not even undo the bands about the feet and hands of one of them.

If necessary, he could bring him down with a shot from his rifle, though this Buffalo Bill did not wish to do.

He had taken the precaution to throw more wood upon the fire he had built near the prisoners, so could see them distinctly.

Then, too, he could see every movement of the corporal, as he walked toward them.

The corporal, meanwhile, went up near to the line of prisoners, all of whom were now lying down, and said in a low tone to Bob Brass:

"See here, I don't wish to have to kill Buffalo Bill."

"Why not?"

"Well, he twice risked his life to save mine."

"And would now take you to the fort to be hanged, if he knew your intention."

"True, yet would do only his duty."

"Are you weakening?"

"Oh, no, only I cannot but feel the act I must do."

"What do you wish to do with the scout?"

"I should like to set him free, on foot, and while he was making his way to the fort we would have every chance to get to a place of safety, from which to begin our work."

"Have you forgotten that no man knows this country as does Buffalo Bill?"

"That is true."

"Have you forgotten that he would be a bloodhound upon our track, that his pride would force him to recapture the men he so cleverly took in alone, and then lost."

"He would."

"Yes, and he would run us down, mark my words."

THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES.

"With Buffalo Bill out of the way, we have nothing to fear from scouts or soldiers, miners or settlers."

"We can do as we please and strike often and hard where gold is to be had. But with Buffalo Bill alive and on our track, the Mounted Gold Miners would soon be in their graves or driven from this country."

"You are right."

"Now what do you say to showing him mercy now?"

"He will have to die, as I have before decided."

"But—"

"But what?"

"Let me set you free and you do the work."

"With pleasure."

"He knows that I came over here to see if you are all right."

"Yes."

"I will give you my revolver, though your hands are manacled, the chain between gives you free use of them."

"It does."

"I will tell him that I believe you are getting your irons off of your feet."

"I understand."

"Then, when he comes to see you, that is your time to act."

"And I will."

"Make no mistake."

"Trust me for doing my work well; but if I kill the scout I should be your leader."

"No."

"I say yes, for it is little that you do for us."

"I will not do that little, then."

"You hold the trump cards, so I yield."

"You are wise."

"Give me your revolver and call the scout to his doom."

The weapon was handed to Bob Brass, and then the corporal called out:

"Oh, Chief Cody, come here, please, for I think you are wanted, as Bob Brass has nearly freed his feet!"

Buffalo Bill sprang to his feet and approached the spot. He knew that the ordeal was upon him.

CHAPTER XVII. THE DOUBLE ATTACK.

Buffalo Bill walked rapidly toward the scene where he believed there was to be a tragedy enacted.

He felt that the corporal, with the gallows looming up before him for his crimes, would not surrender at demand.

Though he had removed the cartridges from the corporal's weapons, he yet could not but realize that, bound though they were, they were nine men to one, and no help within half a hundred miles.

The soldier had called him to die, that was certain.

But what would the result be?

Had the soldier a weapon he knew not of.

Had he discovered the cartridges gone from his revolver and reloaded it?

These chances the scout must face.

And face them he did.

Boldly he walked up near to the soldier and asked:

"What is it, corporal?"

"Bob Brass has freed one of his feet from the manacles on his ankles, sir."

"Indeed!"

"I did not believe that possible."

"I will have a look at him."

As he stepped forward Buffalo Bill did so in a way that did not place the corporal at his back.

The men all lay quiet now, as though asleep, save the two next to Bob Brass.

These two were anxious and nervous.

They did not know but that there would be a shooting match, unless their leader killed the scout at the first shot.

As he got to within a step of the leader, he suddenly rose to a sitting posture, his hand was thrown forward, and he called out, savagely:

"Now you die, Buffalo Bill!"

The intention of the man certainly was to kill.

His hands were as steady as a rock, his aim full at the heart of the scout.

The latter was outlined against the firelight and a splendid target.

So sure of the scout's instant death was the corporal that he turned his head away, not to witness the fall of the man he had betrayed.

But, to the horror of all save Buffalo Bill, the weapon in the hands of Bob Brass did not explode.

There was only the snap of the hammer.

With a curse most malignant, and a dread of instant death, Bob Brass drew trigger again and again.

But the result was the same.

There was no report from the weapon, other than the click of the hammer.

"Kill him, corporal!"

"For God's sake be quick!"

The cry was in earnest, for the man thought he saw death before him.

Driven to act, the corporal turned toward Buffalo Bill, revolver now drawn, just as Bob Brass, in a frenzy, hurled with both hands the revolver full at the scout.

Buffalo Bill had realized that Bob Brass had been given the unloaded weapon by the corporal to kill him.

He also knew that the man was still heavily ironed, and he made no effort to fire at him in return.

The corporal also having an unloaded weapon, he did not regard him as dangerous, and so he calmly turned toward him at the appeal of Bob Brass to cover him with his weapons.

Unfortunately, however, for the scout, the revolver hurled with great force by Bob Brass struck him on the arm, knocking his weapon from his grasp, and then gave him a blow upon the breast that was most severe.

It knocked the breath from his body and felled him his length upon the ground.

"Kill him, corporal! kill him!" shrieked Bob Brass.

"Kill him, corporal; kill him!" yelled the prisoners in a chorus, all now sitting up and terribly excited.

The corporal had momentarily remained inactive, like one dazed by the situation he found himself in.

But he soon was convinced that unless he acted promptly his own life was in danger, and that if he did not kill Buffalo Bill he would no longer hold an atom of influence with the band of outlaws he hoped to command.

So the corporal acted.

He drew his revolver, cursed the scout as he fell, and pulled trigger.

But the weapon did not fire.

In dismay, he again pulled trigger.

The result was the same.

Again and again as his finger drew hard on the trigger there came that, to him, same sickening snap, instead of report.

Driven to desperation as he saw that the scout was not seriously hurt, and hearing the wild cries of the prisoners, he threw himself upon the prostrate form and grappled with him.

Buffalo Bill had regained his breath, and was just rising when the corporal threw himself upon him.

The weight sent him back upon the ground, and his revolver having been knocked from his hand, he held no weapon in his grasp.

He, however, had a revolver and knife in his belt, and these he must keep the corporal from getting, and, if necessary, use himself.

The corporal was a large man, one of great strength, and his fight now was the one of his life.

He had the advantage, too, of having made the attack, and caught the scout at a disadvantage.

But he discovered that Buffalo Bill was a man to dread under all circumstances.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ONE LIFE AGAINST NINE.

The scout knew his danger, all that he had to contend against, and just what victory or defeat meant to the outlaws and himself.

He remembered that the corporal was well known as an athlete, a boxer, wrestler, and man of great activity and strength.

But he was not in the least alarmed.

He had never yet met his match, and he did not now expect to do so.

Often had the officers at the fort wished to see a contest of strength between the corporal and the chief of scouts, but they had never met.

Now it was that they were to meet in a fight for the life or death of one.

The scout had his own life to protect, nine other lives to hold in his keeping.

The corporal had grasped for his throat, while he was feeling around for the revolver, struck from his hand by the well-aimed blow of Bob Brass with the unloaded weapon.

Buffalo Bill tore the corporal's hand from his throat with an iron force that made the soldier feel that he had met his match.

Confident in his strength, in his power to subdue the scout, he had suddenly made known to him, that the stories of Buffalo Bill's phenomenal strength were not exaggerated.

Again he sought with one hand to grasp the scout's throat, with the other to tear a weapon, bowie or revolver, from his belt.

But the hand reaching for the weapons was grasped in a steel-like grip that caused him pain, and there held.

The hand that made the grip again at the throat was

forced back, and the blows then aimed at the face of the scout were parried most skillfully.

It was a battle of giants, and the outlaws were wild with excitement.

"Men, we must reach them!" yelled Bob Brass, and the whole line tried hard to do so.

They got within three feet of the struggling men, but no further.

The lariat held firm.

In vain they tugged, waved, and stretched their bound arms.

They could not reach the fighting giants.

"Corporal, hurl him this way."

"Force him within our reach!" shouted Bob Brass.

The corporal tried to obey.

Instead, he was hurled over on his back a yard further off.

The outlaws were in a mad frenzy of excitement.

They were simply gone mad with fear and hope.

They watched the struggle while they yelled encouragement to the corporal.

"Get one of his weapons from his belt!"

"Choke him!"

"Pick up the weapon yonder!"

"Drive your fist into his face!"

"Roll him over to us and we'll fix him, tied though we are!"

"Put your teeth into him!"

"Oh, pard! pard, don't let him do you, or we all hangs!"

These cries were meant to encourage the soldier.

Whether they did or not, he did not appear to be able to obey a single injunction, strive as he might.

He had never met a man who could handle him as did Buffalo Bill.

And handle him the scout did, for each blow was turned or caught on the arm, the other hand was still in a grip of steel, and the corporal had changed positions, he now being beneath the weight of his adversary.

Buffalo Bill was not fighting to kill, but to subdue.

He was determined to take his man alive.

Each weapon had been taken from his belt and hurled out of reach.

This proved that he was not fearful of the result.

It was like a death blow to the outlaws who saw it, and they tugged like mad at the lariat.

At the command of Bob Brass, several of them with the sharpest teeth were gnawing at rawhide plaited rope to cut it in two.

"Gnaw like beavers, men, and you'll soon get it cut!" cried Bob Brass.

It was an unlucky remark for him, as it reached the ears of Buffalo Bill.

At once he put forth all his strength to end the struggle.

Well he knew that if the eight men freed themselves from that line, stretched from tree to tree, that they would soon be upon him.

Bound as they were, hands and feet, they could easily get the best of him.

They could pick up his weapons and quickly end the struggle.

This would never do, and with a mighty effort he set to work to conquer his man.

THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES.

He forced one arm beneath his knee and held it there. Then the other was forced beneath the other knee, while his hands grasped the corporal's throat and tightened upon it.

Soon the struggles ceased and the soldier grew black in the face.

"It is nearly cut in two!

"All together, men!

"Throw your weight upon the lariat!" yelled Bob Brass, in excited tones.

The men did so, there was a snap, and all fell as the lariat broke, and with wild yells they began to rise to hurl themselves upon Buffalo Bill and end him then and there.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ORDEAL ENDED.

Buffalo Bill had recognized just in time that the outlaws, if the lariat broke, would be upon him.

He tightened his grip upon the corporal's throat, dashed his clinched fist once, twice, thrice into his face, and felt that he was no longer dangerous.

The soldier lay limp as a rag.

He had been half choaked to death, and stunned as well.

In an instant of time, the scout then grasped his two weapons from the ground, and facing the outlaws, as he crouched panting upon the ground, met them just as the lariat parted and they were scrambling up to throw themselves upon him.

The first to rise was Bob Brass.

He looked squarely into the muzzles of the scout's revolvers, and heard the threatening words:

"These weapons are loaded!

"I have twelve shots, and you are but eight.

"Back! or take the consequences!"

Bob Brass shrank back.

His men did the same, save one.

He rushed forward, bound though he was.

"I'll give you proof that I told the truth," and with the words the shot rang out.

With the report the man uttered a cry and raised his bound hands to his head.

"I merely clipped your ear; but let it be a warning."

It was a warning, for the man quickly shrank back.

"Corporal! oh, corporal!" shouted Bob Brass.

"He is all right for a while.

"You get back in line between those men!"

The scout's order was sullenly obeyed.

Then Buffalo Bill turned to one of the saddles and got another lariat.

This was bound between the trees and passed between the arms of the men, thus securing each one.

As Buffalo Bill turned from his work he saw the corporal sitting up.

The man's face was bleeding and he was gasping for breath.

Instantly he stepped toward him with an end of the severed lariat.

Grasping his hands, he bent them behind his back and bound them there securely, passing the lariat down then to his ankles and making them secure.

The soldier still gasped for breath, and yet said not a word.

He seemed to know all, yet had not the power of resistance.

Stepping to the creek, Buffalo Bill filled a canteen, and returning, bathed the face and throat of the soldier, giving him also a few swallows of water.

The man seemed to quickly revive at this, and said in a low, hoarse tone:

"You are kind.

"I deserve death rather than kindness at your hands, or is it for the hope of revenge, to see me hanged?"

"It is to do my duty only as I see it."

"I believe that."

"I was on your trail, for I know all that you have done, Dave Strong."

"You know?"

"Yes."

"What do you know?" asked the corporal in a louder voice and excitedly.

"That you killed a sergeant and sentinel at the fort."

"My God! that does mean that I am to hang, for you will take me back there."

"Yes."

"Why, corporal, you are better worthy to be our leader than I thought," called out Bob Brass, who, with the others, had heard all.

"Yes, a worthy leader," was the loud reply.

"Killed a sergeant and a sentinel, did he, Cody?"

"Yes."

"And you were upon his trail?"

"I was."

"Well, it only increases my admiration for you, as you certainly roped him in most cleverly."

"And when I had him cornered, and thought I would get his horse and provisions, for I did not wish to kill him."

"No, and had you been less merciful we would all have been free now," savagely said Bob Brass.

"It is hard to take the life of a man who has twice risked his to save yours."

"I spare no man that stands in my way, nor woman either."

"But it seems now as though we are in a very bad box."

"The rope first, the box afterward," said the corporal, with a little smile, and he added:

"Great God, Chief Cody, what strength you have."

"I never met my match before."

"I can return the compliment, corporal."

"But come, I wish to make you fast to this tree, for we must get what rest we can, as to-morrow I shall keep straight on to the fort, with only short halts."

"And to the fort he shall not take us, men, if we have our way, and we must, for nine of us, though bound, must subdue one man," shouted Bob Brass.

"I shall take you to the fort alive, if I can; dead, if I must," was Buffalo Bill's cool reply, and the remark had its weight, though Corporal Strong remarked:

"It is better to die, if we must, by bullet, rather than by a rope end."

Having secured all of his prisoners again, Buffalo Bill

threw more wood in the fire and then went off on a scout around the camp.

It was well that he did so.

CHAPTER XX.

A HIDDEN FOE.

Buffalo Bill had not long left the cliff, with his prisoners and Corporal Strong, when a horseman rode up to the rendezvous where Bob Brass had met the men he had picked for scouting work.

The stranger was a man of fine presence, dressed in scouting garb, and a thorough type of a daring borderman.

He had a face that was darkly bronzed, was handsome and fearless, and he was well armed and mounted.

He was Jim King, a celebrated outlaw leader, feared far and near for his red deeds.

He it was who had sent Bob Brass, acting as his lieutenant, to organize a new band for him, for the band which he had formerly commanded had been scattered, some having left for the East and others having been killed.

He looked disappointed when he drew rein at the rendezvous beneath the cliff and gazed about him as a man would who was surprised at the signs his experienced eye read.

"There has been trouble here, for the red stains are proof of that; but where are the graves, if any one was killed?" he muttered.

Dismounting, he carefully walked over the whole surroundings, after which he again took to the saddle and started off on the trail to the meadow.

Here he looked about with a determination to read all signs he saw, and then taking the trail again, followed it up the bank of the stream, through the gap and to the plateau which ended at the cliff.

For a long while the horseman searched about the cliff, and at last, as though his mind was made up, said aloud:

"I don't just understand it all; but I will follow the trail and see where it leads, and find out just what all these signs mean."

With this he once more mounted and started off upon the trail of Buffalo Bill and his captives.

Night found him still on the trail, but as then it led through a valley, he felt that he could not go far wrong by pushing on for a few miles farther before he camped.

At last, just as the nature of the country was changing so that a trail might branch off in any direction, he decided to find a camping ground, so pushed off to the left, where there was an open space denoting grazing grounds for his horse, and with timber near for him to spread his blankets in.

Suddenly he halted, for, as he approached the meadows he saw horses staked out there.

He counted them in the bright starlight, and then turned and rode back to the shelter of some willows he had found.

Here he dismounted and hitched his horse, and approaching the timber carefully, he came in sight of just one, then another camp-fire.

"They are camped there, for it can be none other than Brass and his men."

"But, observing the signs of trouble which I have, I must make no mistake, but go slow."

Cautiously he approached the fire, when he halted quickly at the sound of a shot.

"There is still trouble there."

"What can it mean?" he muttered.

There were yells heard soon after the shot, oaths and voices in rage and excitement.

"I would like to go there and see what it means, yet I do not dare do so until I am sure the one I hold interest in is worthy."

With this he waited where he was, gazing toward the camp-fire and listening to every sound.

At length the sounds ceased over in the camp, and soon after the stranger saw a tall form pass from one campfire to the other.

He watched the form move about one of the fires for a moment, and then come directly toward where he was in hiding, as though to go toward the horses in the little meadow a couple of hundred yards distant.

"If he does not change his way he will come directly upon me."

"So be it, for the camp-fire told me who he is, and if I expect to win in the game I am going to play for gold, he must be the first one to remove from our path."

"Yes, Buffalo Bill, your minutes, yes, seconds, are numbered."

With this the man rested his revolver in the crotch of a tree and awaited the approach of the scout.

What impulse changed the steps of Buffalo Bill, who can tell, but suddenly, when yet a hundred feet from his ambushed foe, he turned short off to the left and disappeared in a thicket.

The man drew a long breath.

He could hardly believe his own eyes.

He was silent, thoughtful, and then spoke:

"It is said that a special Providence guards Buffalo Bill's life for some great good in the end."

"I believe it, for he foiled me in the very minute I felt his life was mine."

"But where has he gone?

"I must look out for him."

"Did he suspect my presence here."

"Nonsense! It was only an intuition to change his steps in another direction."

"But, then, what is Buffalo Bill doing here, I wonder, and with Bob Brass and his men?"

"That looks strange, indeed, and the signs about that cliff, that shot a while since, the cries, and all tell me there is some trouble I cannot fathom."

"Whatever has happened, Buffalo Bill holds the mastery, or he would not be free."

"If he is here, then he has some of his men, or soldiers, with him, and that means, yes, it can mean nothing else than that he has Bob Brass and his men prisoners."

"Yes, that is it, and I must rescue them."

"A fitting act this will be for their new captain, to save them from Buffalo Bill."

"But now to find out how many I have to face, and first to see just what has become of Buffalo Bill."

THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES.

CHAPTER XXI.

RECONNOTTERING IN THE DARK.

If one would ask Buffalo Bill what changed his steps when he was walking right upon a hidden foe, he could not answer.

It was an impulse the same as had influenced him a hundred times before to do a certain act or not to go in a certain direction.

Hardly conscious that he felt an occult warning, he yet did so, and turned abruptly to the left into a pine thicket.

This led him to an open swale, and beyond was a fringe of willows.

He crossed the swale, and, entering the willows, determined to make a complete circuit of the camp.

Somewhat he often acted from instinct, and there was a feeling in his heart that there was some danger near.

What it was he could not fathom, but the feeling was there, and he never disregarded a presentiment of evil, though his is not a really superstitious nature.

Reaching the willows, he suddenly sprang to cover, throwing himself flat upon the ground.

He had heard a sound not twenty feet from him.

For a moment he lay there, and then made a discovery. A horse was hitched within a few paces of where he lay.

Who was his rider?

Where was his rider?

Buffalo Bill was the one to find out.

Approaching the horse, he unfastened him, led him out into the meadow and across where the other animals were feeding.

Next he unsaddled and unbridled him, and staked him out near the other horses.

The starlight revealed that he had captured a fine horse, thoroughly equipped, and with a full camping outfit.

But the rider?

He was not to be found.

"It must be one of the outlaw band who arrived late at the rendezvous and has followed to rescue his comrades."

"Now that I am onto him, it will not be such an easy rescue as he may think," muttered the scout.

Then he stood lost in thought fully a minute.

"If he is a comrade and would-be rescuer, then the two fires will reveal the camp."

"Naturally he will approach from the safest side, but as the prisoners are on the point around which the stream flows, he will have to get to them from the front, across the water."

"He could do the latter, release them and take them all that way, or, discovering that I was alone in charge of them, simply lie in wait for me to go there again."

"I think I will take to the water myself and see what I can discover, for if that fellow is lying in wait, he would surely see me before I would him."

"Who else than one of their band I cannot imagine, but still he may be a friend, and in such case I must go slow, for I do not wish to draw trigger on a pard under any circumstances."

So mused Buffalo Bill, and with him to come to a decision was to very promptly carry it out.

He accordingly began to scout around the camp until he came to the stream.

Here he took off his boots, outer clothing and hat, and crossed over without having to swim.

Upon the other bank there were bowlders and large trees, and making his way along he soon drew opposite to where his prisoners were, guided by the fire near them.

Going a few rods above the fire, he entered the water, and holding his belt of arms high above him in one hand, he swam across the stream, which around the point ran swiftly and was quite deep.

Without a sound to disturb the prisoners, he reached the other bank and came out within fifteen feet of them.

All was quiet there, save the snoring of one of the outlaws and deep breathing of another.

"He is not here yet," muttered Buffalo Bill, and peering over the bank, he could see by the light of the campfire that all were lying down save one.

That one was Bob Brass, and he was sitting up.

But where was the rider of that horse which he had left with the other animals?

And again, might he not be then capturing all of the horses?

Never in his life before had Buffalo Bill felt such dire need of a comrade.

If he only had some one to guard the horses while he watched the prisoners.

The loss of the horses would mean perhaps the loss of his prisoners.

There was certainly some one about; the horse found in the willows was proof of that.

Whether he was friend or foe the scout had no way thus far of knowing.

The more he pondered over it, the more he became convinced that, as all was quiet thus far with the prisoners, he should return for a look at the horses, then creep into position to watch near the prisoners, and then keep on the move between them.

"I will go back," he muttered.

But as he uttered the words he distinctly heard a voice.

It came from across the stream, and it called a name: "Bob Brass!"

Buffalo Bill at once crouched down behind the bowlder by which he stood.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE STRANGE RESCUE.

Twice was the name of Bob Brass called, and the voice came apparently from across the stream.

At the second call there was a reply.

It was in a voice meant to be suppressed:

"Who calls Bob Brass?"

"A friend!"

"Friends are scarce just now."

"The more reason that one should be welcome."

"True."

"Where are you?"

"Across the stream."

"Who are you?"

"Jim King, the King of the Mounted Miners of the Overland."

An oath broke from the lips of Bob Brass.

It was one of surprise and joy.

Then followed:

"Is that a square deal?"

"Did I ever fail you?"

"No," and in a lower voice Bob Brass said,

"Pards, wake up, for the man I told you of is here, our captain."

"I expected to meet him elsewhere, but he has got upon our trail and followed us, and that means life to all of us, but don't open your mouths, as Buffalo Bill has got the ears of a fox, and though I watched him go toward the horses, and have not seen him return to his camp, he may be within hearing."

This was spoken in a low, earnest tone, but the man with "the ears of a fox," heard every word.

The men were all awake now, and the snoring and hard breathing had ceased.

The prisoners were nearly twenty feet from the stream, which was fifty feet across, so the man on the other bank was not so very far off.

"Are there no guards near you, Bob Brass?" was heard from across the stream.

"We are all the prisoners of Buffalo Bill, and no one else is near."

"Remarkable! But he has gone some distance off."

"I wish he'd go to —"

A light laugh from the man who had called himself "The King" showed that he appreciated Bob Brass's warm intentions for the scout, but quickly followed the question:

"Can I reach you from that side?"

"Not unless you kill Buffalo Bill, and the odds are you can't."

"This stream is deep."

"You'll have to swim."

"I can do it, and you can all escape this way."

"I have a better plan if you come over."

"I'll come."

"Bring only your knife and a revolver."

"All right."

"I'll be with you in five minutes."

Buffalo Bill had heard every word.

He knew that the man was undressing himself to swim across the stream, and he at once determined to give him a reception.

The outlaws were all talking in a low, earnest tone, but the scout did not care what they said now.

His interest all lay in the bold stranger who was coming to their rescue.

With his arms Buffalo Bill had brought his lariat, hanging on a hook to the belt.

He quietly placed his revolvers on the rock within reach, and then coiled his lariat to use as a weapon when needed.

Peering out upon the waters swiftly running by, he waited to see the bold swimmer.

The heavy timber on both sides of the stream made all dark there, save the light of the camp-fire a rod beyond where the prisoners were.

Soon there was heard a splash in the stream, and a few minutes after a tall, nude form arose not ten feet from the boulder behind which Buffalo Bill was crouching and peered over the bank.

"All right, Bob?"

"Yes."

"No one near?"

"No one to be near save we unfortunates, unless Buffalo Bill is playing it on us."

"No, he is not at this end, I am certain."

"I hope not, but he's a cunning one."

"I have my revolver and bowie."

"You'll need both if you tackle him."

"All right."

"How many are with you?"

"Three dead men lying over yonder, then nine of us all told, for there is a soldier from the fort who is one of us now."

"You are all bound securely?"

"Yes, you'll have some work freeing us."

"But come now and we'll all wait here for the scout to come back, and he'll find us different from the way he left us."

"He will, indeed, and I'll go back and get my clothes, for a brave man is a coward when he is naked."

Bob Brass laughed lightly and replied:

"Now, come, for I am anxious to get free, though I'll be the last, and am ironed hands and feet."

"Buffalo Bill has the key to your irons, so you will soon be free," was the answer, and the stranger leaped lightly upon bank and began to walk toward the prisoners, his revolver in one hand, knife in the other.

He had gone only a few paces when suddenly there came a swishing sound in the air, like that made by a large bird startled into quick flight, and over the head of the strange rescuer nestled the noose of a lariat.

The man realized his danger on the instant and tried to spring out of the reach of the fatal coil, yet in vain, for there was a tightening of the line, a swing, and backward to the ground he was dragged with a suddenness and force that caused him to let fall both revolver and knife.

But the weapons fell within the reach of two of the prisoners.

CHAPTER XXIII.

QUICK WORK.

It was a most critical moment for Buffalo Bill, and no one recognized it better than he did.

He had caught the strange rescuer, it was true; yet in doing so he still had a strong man to subdue, while as he had fallen he had thrown, it so seemed, his revolver and bowie knife toward the prisoners.

The two weapons had fallen within reach of the men, at least two of them, and were eagerly grasped by them.

It was true that their hands were bound together at the wrists, that they were cramped by being tied as they had been for a long time.

Still they could use their hands when life depended upon it, and they meant to do so.

"Pass that revolver to me!" ordered Bob Brass, realizing his opportunity, for with manacles upon his wrists, connected by a short chain, he had much the better use of his hands than did the others.

"Pards, we are free!"

"Now, Buffalo Bill, show yourself!" shouted Bob Brass, as he grasped the revolver.

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But Buffalo Bill made no reply.

He was too busy. He had by sheer strength dragged his captive backward to the bank, and with no gentle hand, for the bare back of the man was scratched by the ground and bushes.

The scout knew that he had not a second to lose, for the knife, even in well-tied hands, would soon sever the bonds of the prisoners.

As the captive reached the bank over the edge he went, struggling fearfully.

But the struggle quickly ended as the scout's fist twice fell upon his face with terrific force.

He knew that he must knock his man out at once.

He wished, too, that the prisoners might believe that he had put him out of existence, for, drawing his revolver, he fired it into the air.

Then with a few coils of the lariat he bound his prisoner and called out, sternly:

"Throw that knife and revolver out of your reach, Bob Brass."

"We haven't got any," was the reply, followed by some words in a low tone, which Buffalo Bill did not catch.

"Obey, or I'll pick you off one by one!"

This was a startling threat, but the answer was a shot, and a bullet cut near the scout's ear.

But a responding shot followed, and a cry arose, with a curse and the words: "He has shattered my hand!"

"I have you between me and the camp-fire, so can pick you off at will."

There was a muttered order, and Buffalo Bill could see that the man with the knife was working hard.

Had his hands been free and not cramped by long being bound, he could very quickly have cut the thongs.

As it was, however, it was no easy task, and this was in the scout's favor.

Then Bob Brass shouted: "Pards, it's the gallows if he gets us to the fort, and the chance of a bullet now."

"He has killed our captain, and he has sent a bullet through my hand, so free ourselves now!"

A yell broke from the others at these words, and Bob Brass struggled to his knees.

In his left hand he grasped the revolver, and was holding it up as well as the manacles would permit.

But he had forgotten that the firelight revealed him distinctly to Buffalo Bill, who himself was in darkness, and had, besides, the stream bank's protection.

Quickly the scout rested his revolver upon the bank and drew trigger.

He had aimed at the hammer of the ruffian's cocked revolver as it was revealed by the firelight.

There was a ring as the unerring bullet struck the hammer, and the revolver was useless.

The weapon dropped from the shackled, benumber hand of the outlaw, and a groan was uttered from a number of lips, as it was realized what the matchless shot of the scout had done.

Springing upon the bank, Buffalo Bill with a bound was before the enraged prisoners, his revolver muzzle thrust into the face of one who had just been set free by his comrade with the bowie knife.

"Spring upon him, pard, and we will soon help you," shouted Corporal Strong, from his place by the tree.

The man attempted to obey, while Bob Brass called out:

"Yes, we'll soon cut ourselves free and help you!"

Buffalo Bill, not wishing to kill unless driven to it, knew that severe measures must be taken, and without a second of delay.

He acted promptly, and it saved him, for, as the man sprang upon him, he was met by a crashing blow from the scout's revolver that dropped him as though a bullet had passed through his heart.

At the same moment a second man had been cut free by the bowie knife and leaped toward the scout.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ESCAPE.

Buffalo Bill was not in the least rattled by his danger, and all he must do to escape it.

No one knew better that he was fighting the fight of his life.

The man he had captured was but stunned, and was only bound temporarily, so he might free himself at any minute, and, recrossing the stream to where his clothes had been left, secure other weapons.

Thus armed, he would be a most dangerous foe, and could pick the scout off at any time, for he would have the advantage in every way, Buffalo Bill having to guard both the prisoners and the horses.

Then there was the man lying at his feet, only stunned, a second one after and attacking him, and others were working hard to sever their bonds with the bowie knife.

A more critical position the scout could not well imagine, yet not for a second did his nerve forsake him.

He grasped the man who assailed him, and again the revolver barrel fell with great force right upon his head.

Down the ruffian dropped, and, bending over him, Buffalo Bill thrust the muzzle of his weapon into the very face of the one who held the bowie, and cried in a voice not to be mistaken:

"Hand me that knife!"

There was a second of terrible suspense, and the weapon was thrust toward the scout, though loud were the cries of Bob Brass and the corporal for the man to use it.

Hurling the bowie out of reach, Buffalo Bill shouted:

"Down flat on your faces, all of you! The man who hesitates, I will surely kill!"

There was quick obedience. Even Bob Brass and the corporal knew that they had been foiled, that the scout would stand no dallying.

With no particularly gentle hand, the scout began to again secure the hands and feet of the three who had been cut free.

The two whom he had felled with a blow of his revolver were first attended to, and the lariats of the men were brought into use.

When, at last, all were secure, and more so than before, Buffalo Bill working quietly, notwithstanding the constant cursing from the gang, he said:

"You two men I will look to later, for those cuts on your heads are severe and must be attended to."

"I was sorry to have to hurt you, but it was either that or lose my life."

The two men had revived, yet were silent and evidently suffering.

Having expertly and quickly secured his prisoners, Buffalo Bill walked toward the stream, for all the while he was anxious as to the fate of his other foe, the strange rescuer.

As he went by Bob Brass the latter called out:

"Do you know that you killed my best friend, Buffalo Bill?"

"No, when?"

"The one who lies dead over yonder."

"Ah, yes; your pard, was he?"

"He was, and I'll have my revenge some day."

"Who was he?"

"Never mind who he was."

The scout walked on and sprang down over the bank where he had left the man.

He was gone!

There lay the lariat on the sand, just where the prisoner had been left, but the prisoner had made his escape.

Nude as he was, he evidently had decided, upon returning to consciousness, to get back with all speed to where his clothes and other weapons were.

The water, too, would help his lacerated back, he doubtless decided.

Not a word did the scout utter to inform the prisoners that the particular pard of Bob Brass was not only not dead, but had escaped.

He knew but too well what this escape meant, though he was glad to recall that he had his horse, his outfit, one revolver he could account for, and his knife.

Still the man must have a rifle and another revolver.

With both the prisoners and the horses to look after, Buffalo Bill felt sure that the stranger could get either one or the other out of his possession—if he did not in some way prevent.

Feeling that he was in a scrape, the scout sprang upon the bank and approached the prisoners.

"You've got your lariat, I see, so I suppose death keeps my poor pard quiet," Bob Brass remarked.

"I have other use for my lariat," was the evasive reply, and Buffalo Bill passed on to the camp-fire.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE UNERRING LASSO.

Buffalo Bill felt that his life was at stake as he walked up to the camp-fire.

He knew that the escaped stranger could easily pick him off from across the stream with his rifle.

But he must take the chances to carry out his plan to circumvent the man.

That plan will soon be revealed.

Straight up to the fire he walked, and, fortunately, it was dying out, so did not cast such a bright light.

Instantly he scattered the embers, and picking up one end of the burning logs, he cast them into the stream.

In a couple of minutes all was darkness.

Just why the scout had put out the fire not one of the prisoners could imagine.

They had not the slightest doubt of the strange rescuer's death, so supposed the scout had some reason for

putting out the fire which he intended they should guess at.

So, when there was only a few glowing embers left, Buffalo Bill walked over to where he had left his blankets, and, spreading them some thirty feet away from the prisoners, lay down as though to sleep.

He moved about like a man who was very tired, and surely he was, but he did not intend by any means to seek rest.

The prisoners could not see him after he lay down, and they did not observe that he noiselessly crept away out of the little point.

While they supposed him sleeping, or at least resting, he was making his way to where he had left his outer clothing, and intended from there to go to where the horses were.

Between the prisoners and the horses he would lie in wait for the man whom he now had so much reason to dread being free.

The other camp-fire was still burning, but that was of no importance, as neither prisoners nor horses were near it.

Having gotten his clothes, the scout noiselessly made his way to the edge of the timber, where he could look out upon the horses.

They were still there, and did not seem to be disturbed by the close presence of any one.

But the scout felt assured in his mind that the first act of the strange rescuer would be to carry the horses off to a secure spot, after which he could return and attempt to get a shot at him, thus setting his companions free.

That he had put the fire out made him feel that the stranger would suppose he intended to remain by the prisoners and in hiding, to catch him when he made another attempt to free them.

But Buffalo Bill was one who was up to all border cunning and bold trickery.

He could play at any game another man could, and was particularly apt in seeming to intuitively know just what their intentions would be.

Feeling sure that the man had escaped just before he had gotten back to the spot where he had left him, and, with having to recross the stream, dress, make his way down upon the other bank and there again to cross over and get to where the horses were, that he had not yet had time to get to them, Buffalo Bill boldly decided to walk out among them.

This he did.

No one was there.

Instantly he made his own thoroughly trained animal lie down, and right at his back he also crouched.

Thus moments passed until half an hour had gone by.

Then the scout saw several of the feeding horses raise their heads and prick up their ears.

The stranger was surely coming.

He was coming, too, from the farther side of the camp, so had made a detour.

This had taken him longer to get there.

The scout saw him crossing the meadow, and he got his lariat ready.

He also had his revolver and knife within easy reach.

Nearer and nearer came the form.

It reached the first animal, hesitated a moment, passed to the next, and then came toward where the scout lay by the side of his own horse.

Then he turned as though to go to others, and Buffalo Bill saw that he was pulling up the stake-ropes and tying them about the necks of the horses.

This must not go on, or he would set the whole lot free and stampede them.

So the scout arose and his lariat swung around and around his head.

The man was not thirty feet away, tying another stake-rope about the neck of the horse.

Another swing, and the coil, unerring in its aim from the hand of Buffalo Bill, and heavy from its wetting, was thrown with all the skill and force the scout's good right hand could muster.

The noose settled well over the head, there was a startled exclamation, a bound into the air, a sharp twang as the rope became taut, and the form was dragged backward and fell with a dull, heavy thud.

And the form did not rise, did not struggle.

Bounding forward, Buffalo Bill bent over the prostrate form, looked closely into his face, pressed his hand over the heart, and said solemnly:

"An Indian, and dead!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CAPTURE.

"Dead as an Indian!" was the verdict of Buffalo Bill, upon reaching the side of the fallen man.

He had seen in the starlight that it was not the man he had captured before, that he had come here to thwart.

Verily he seemed to be getting more and more into trouble and difficulties.

That the one he had landed was an Indian the scout read aright.

He was sure that he was the scout of some band camped not very far away.

He had seen the camp-fire, reconnoitered, and was going to stampede the horses, leaving the palefaces afoot.

In the bound he had given, when dismayed, he had sprung forward with such force that the tightening lariat had simply broken his neck, killing him instantly.

Moving the head from side to side, the scout saw that the neck was broken.

He had nothing to fear from the redskin.

There was no need to bind his limbs, for death had palsied them forever.

The lasso was taken from about the neck, and the body was drawn up close to the scout's horse, which had not yet risen from the ground.

Then Buffalo Bill once more began to watch and wait.

He knew that it was midnight now.

The strange rescuer must soon appear, or he would go back to have a look at his prisoners.

With Indians near he made up his mind as to his course.

He would lead his horse up to the camp if he captured the stranger, mount his prisoners, and press right on through the night and day to the fort.

It would be a hard ride for horses and men, but he would take no more chances, crowded as he was by prisoners and dead men.

He was particularly anxious now to get away soon, as the camp from which the Indian came could not be far away, and daylight would put them on his trail.

Then, too, he was most anxious not to have to fire upon the stranger when he saw him.

He wished no sound to alarm the band of Indians, the comrades of the one he had killed.

As he waited he saw a form leave the timber.

"Now for him," he muttered.

But it was not the stranger rescuer.

Instead it was the Indian pony following his dead master.

He had pulled up the stake rope and was dragging it after him.

He came right up to the scout, and was speedily captured.

Hardly had he and the other horses freed by the Indian been again staked out when another form appeared.

This time there was no mistake.

It was the stranger rescuer.

He came along, too, as though he had nothing to fear.

He walked boldly in among the horses, pulled up the stake pin of first one, then the other, and then began to gather them together.

As he came up to the horse of Buffalo Bill, still lying down, he was leading four of the animals.

Up rose the horse, but up with him rose the form of Buffalo Bill.

With a leap like a panther's, the scout was upon the man, and down he went backward under the weight and blow dealt.

The scout's hand was upon his throat as he fell, choking off all outcry, and the surprised man felt the cold point of a knife pressed hard against his neck and heard the low, hoarsely muttered words:

"Resist and you are a dead man!"

There was a nod in answer, for the iron grip of the scout choked off all utterance.

Then the scout said: "As I rise turn upon your face.

"An outcry will cause you to feel my knife blade between your ribs."

The man obeyed, and the lariat of the scout was quickly brought into requisition.

The hands were securely bound behind the back, and the feet also secured, but given length enough of line to walk slowly.

"Now, rise."

The man obeyed.

"If you move from this spot, I will—no, I'll see that you don't," and Buffalo Bill bound the man to the stake rope of his horse, knowing that he would remain where he left him.

Then the scout caught the horses that had been released by the stranger in the scuffle, and, bringing them up, mounted his prisoner upon his own horse, tying him to the saddle and removing the weapons hanging on the saddle horn to his own horse.

"I had little to fear from you, I see, as your weapons were here, save those you took with you," said the scout.

The prisoner made no reply.

Having brought up the Indian pony, the scout bound his dead master upon him, the stranger being surprised

and looking on with wonder as to how the body got there.

Having collected all the horses, Buffalo Bill led them up toward the camp where the prisoners were, and where the saddles and bridles had been left.

Thus far the prisoner just captured had not spoken.

He appeared dazed at the misfortune that had befallen him.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BUFFALO BILL'S PRISONERS EXPRESS THEIR OPINIONS.

The prisoners, nine in number, with the corporal, were not very long in making the discovery that Buffalo Bill was not lying behind the tree where they had seen him spread his blankets and drop down.

The corporal nearest to him, had kept his eye upon the scout, even in the darkness, and had been sure that he saw him glide away.

He was determined to find out, and after waiting five minutes or more he raised a rock with both of his feet, moved his legs to and fro, and gave it a toss as well as he could.

For such an awkward manner of throwing a stone weighing a pound or more, the corporal did splendidly, for it fell right where the scout was supposed to be lying.

If he had been there it would have hit him, and he would naturally have thought it had been thrown with intent to harm him.

"I knew he had slipped away, Brass," said the corporal.
"Who?"

"The scout!"

"Where is he?"

"Gone scouting around, I guess."

"I heard him move a minute ago."

"That was a stone I threw."

"Well, we can't do anything."

"Not that I see just now."

"Do you see any plan for the future?"

"We are nine, he is but one, and bound as we are, we ought to better him in some way."

"I am with you, for I am going to avenge the captain if I live."

"It was just as well that Buffalo Bill killed the man you call captain."

"Why so?"

"Well, I am to be captain of this layout if we don't all hang."

"Get out of this fix, and, now that the captain is dead, I will say yes."

"We have not reached the fort yet."

"No."

"And it's a long trail for one man to take nine prisoners over."

"I grant that; but you appear to forget who the man is, that has got us dead to rights!"

"No; Buffalo Bill can be worsted as can any other man."

"I am with you if you can prove it."

"I intend to try."

"You know he, single handed, roped nine of us in, killed one, and then took you in out of the wet."

"I have not forgotten it."

"He then got that pard of mine in the very moment of

his success in rescuing us, and, though he got hold of a revolver and a knife, and three of us cut loose, he put a hole through my hand, and, as I at first believed, had shattered the bone."

"I am glad it was no worse."

"So am I, and I must say he fixed it up for me with the skill of a doctor."

"And he took the hammer off of your revolver clean as anything could be done," said one of the men.

"He did, and no better shots were ever made than the one at my hand and the other at the hammer of my revolver."

"That's so," came in a chorus from the men.

"Ah, I admit he is a good one, Pard Brass, but even he can be downed," the corporal said.

"He has never yet been."

"That's so."

"He is going to hang us all yet."

"He has a charmed life."

"Ther lead hain't mined ter make the bullet that kills Buffalo Bill."

"No, nor ther steel hain't made yet that kin knife him."

"Pards, he hain't no common man."

"He are a howling team."

"You bet he cut out ther work fer himself ter do, and he is going ter do it."

"That means hang us."

Both Bob Brass and the corporal listened to these opinions the men expressed about Buffalo Bill, and the former said:

"Yes, he is a very wonderful man, that same scout, and if I didn't hate him so I would admire him immensely."

"Yes, one must admire such grit, nerve, and expertness in all he sets out to do; but after all he is but a man, and he has got to put us on our horses, take us off, put us on again, and take us a long trail to the fort."

"Very true; but he'll do it," said Brass.

"I say no!"

"Well, since he killed my pard, I believe he can do anything, for I thought that the king bore a charmed life."

"The king?"

"Yes, that is what my pard was called, for he was king of them all."

"Yet he went under."

"Very true."

"And so I say if we will watch our chances, keep our eyes on each other, take every opportunity and risk to act together, even if one, two, or three of us should go under, we can down him, and escape."

"Will you try it, men?"

"We are ready," came the low, determined reply.

"Well, I will lead you, so keep your eyes on me, and I tell you that Buffalo Bill will never get us to the fort."

"Boys, you have the corporal's pledge," said Bob Brass.

"We have!" came as though from one man.

"Very well, now be on the watch, for I do not intend to hang."

"Oh, Lord!" cried one of the men, suddenly.

"What is it?" asked all in a breath.

"We are done for sure, hanged, for see, yonder comes

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"a lot of cavalrymen," and he pointed through the darkness to an open space where were visible a number of horses coming directly toward them.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SURPRISING THE PRISONERS.

The prisoners lost heart at sight of the coming cavalry.

They could only see in the darkness a body of horsemen, as they supposed, approaching, and mistook them for cavalry from the fort.

This thought did away with all hope of escape for them.

Instead, however, it was Buffalo Bill with his prisoner, the dead redskin, and leading the horses.

As he drew near, the scout halted his horses, gathered up the embers of the scattered fire, and soon had a blaze high enough for the prisoners to see that no United States troopers were there.

When the fire sent its light upon the scene there were their own horses and a man was seated upon one of the animals, a dead body was strapped to another—the Indian pony.

Brighter burned the fire, and suddenly Bob Brass uttered a cry.

It was at sight of the horseman he had but indistinctly seen before.

"My God! It is you, King? He did not kill you, after all," cried Bob Brass.

"No, Brass, I am all right, save a badly scratched back and being a prisoner; but you are in the same bad plight, see," answered the man.

"Yes, but how did one man master you?"

"It was Buffalo Bill, I find."

"Yes, that accounts for it; but whose dead Indian is that?"

"He belongs to Buffalo Bill, as we all seem to do."

"How many are you?"

"Ten with you, and four dead bodies, counting the redskin."

"And Buffalo Bill is alone?"

"As you see."

"Do you mean that he has alone taken in this outfit?"

"It is just what he has done."

"I do not feel so badly, then, at my being captured by him."

"He has a way of doing things that other men would never attempt."

"So it seems."

"But what is he going to do with you?"

"Take us to the fort."

"For what reason?"

"To hang us."

"For what?"

"He claims that we are outlaws."

"Ah! Then I suppose he will wish to include me in the same category, when I only saw comrades in trouble and intended to help you out."

Buffalo Bill had been moving about the while, gathering the saddles and bridles of the party, and preparing to leave the camp.

He overheard the last that was said, and, turning, fixed his eyes upon the stranger.

He saw him distinctly now by the light of the fire, and said:

"So you recognized your friends in the darkness, and came to rescue them, did you?"

"I know Bob Brass, but none of the others."

"I intended to rescue him."

"He was a prisoner."

"To a Government officer, yes; but how could you recognize him in the dense darkness?"

"I saw him by the firelight."

"What were you doing sneaking around my camp at night?"

The man was silent, and Buffalo Bill continued:

"You are in league with Bob Brass, and he is an outlaw. So you go to the fort with the others of the band."

"I am an honest miner, and no outlaw."

"That you will have to prove before the court of officers that will try you, for I accuse you, Bob Brass, and his followers of being outlaws known as the League of Mounted Miners."

It was very evident that Buffalo Bill was in no very amiable mood, after all he had passed through in capturing and guarding his prisoners.

He knew his danger still was great, had had proof that a band of Indians was not far away, and a long, fatiguing and perilous ride was before him, with a body of desperate men to carry along.

But he did not flinch from his work, and one by one bridled and saddled the horses.

Then the camp outfit was brought from the other fire and put on his horse, while the bodies of the dead men were strapped securely upon the animals selected to bear them.

When all preparations had been made, Buffalo Bill went first to the corporal and quietly unbound him from the tree.

The lariat holding the others in a line was fastened again, showing that the scout intended taking no chances.

Though anxious to get well on his way before dawn, Buffalo Bill did not show his prisoners that he was in a hurry, or was in the least disturbed by the task before him.

The corporal was securely fastened to his saddle, and returning to the line Buffalo Bill said, sternly:

"I am in no humor to be trifled with, men, and the first man who shows me any of his ugly spirit or attempts to detain me, I shall let him feel the weight of my revolver on his head."

"Now I have warned you, so heed."

Whatever plan the men had formed to delay and bother the scout this threat prevented it, for the men at once obeyed his every word.

Then the horses were tied two by two, lines running back from the scout's saddle horn to the bit of all the animals, and to their great surprise Buffalo Bill had successfully mastered all difficulties and started them upon the trail to the fort.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CONCLUSION.

Buffalo Bill had thrown more wood upon the two fires before leaving.

He knew that if discovered by the Indians they would lose considerable time reconnoitering to see if there were persons camping there, and not attempt to follow the trail until daylight.

How many Indians were near the scout had no means of knowing, but he felt sure that the band did not number less than half a hundred.

If he got two hours' start of the redskins, and it was just that long before daybreak, he believed he could keep well ahead of all pursuers.

At least, he could but try.

He knew that the outlaws in that part of the country were said to be in league with the redskins, and, when pressed by the soldiers, after some more daring and cruel act than usual, they always retreated to the Indian country.

If Bob Brass and his men were friendly with the Indians, it would make it that much harder for himself, Buffalo Bill knew well.

In such a case he would be the one to suffer most, as he could not trust his prisoners with arms to fight back the redskins.

Along the trail they rode, Buffalo Bill keeping the stranger, his last captive, by his side.

Bob Brass was next, with a dead outlaw by his side, and then came the corporal with the Indian pony and his dead master.

The two other dead bodies each had an outlaw riding by their sides, and the rest of the band followed.

In putting the prisoners upon their horses, Buffalo Bill had bound their hands to the saddle horns and their weapons were also swung to their horses.

At a steady, brisk pace the scout led the way, the darkness not the least disconcerting him, and eagerly did the outlaws watch for the coming of day.

"Men, I shall not halt until noon, unless forced to do so, and to give you a mouthful of food and water."

"Then I shall push on to the fort without another stop, if possible, so nerve yourselves for a very hard ride."

"It will kill me," said one of the outlaws.

"Then you will be in luck not to live to die on the gallows," Bob Brass answered, while the corporal asked:

"Why push us so hard, Chief Cody, for I have had but little rest, and am feeling badly."

"That is your own fault, not mine, David Strong, and with the outfit I have here to take care of, I shall take no chances of escape."

"I am as tired as any of you, and have had some rather hard usage, but I will stand the ride all right, and you must do the same."

There was a sound like a groan ran along the line, and the stranger asked:

"If you see one of the men greatly overtaxed, will you not halt?"

"No, for this is as fine a nest of 'possums as I ever saw, and should a man break down he must take the consequences, for he is tied to his saddle and cannot fall."

"But the horses may give out, Buffalo Bill," urged Bob Brass.

"Then the others will have to do double work."

"This is not like you, Chief Cody, for I have always known you to be of a kind, not cruel, nature."

"Corporal, what I have had to go through within the past twenty-four hours would change any man's nature."

"I left the fort in chase of you, and you know what followed."

"No, I am merciless now until I get you to the fort and my duty done."

The dawn was breaking now, and as it grew brighter and lighter the men eagerly looked for some sign upon the scout's face to show a ray of hope for them.

There was none,

He was haggard, pale, and evidently felt the great strain upon him.

The men, too, looked the worse by far from what they had passed through with.

Two of them had their heads cut by the blow of Buffalo Bill, who had plastered up the wounds as best he could.

Two others, the stranger and the corporal, looked like wrecks, from the blows dealt them by Buffalo Bill in his struggle with them.

Bob Brass had one hand bound up where the bullet of Buffalo Bill's revolver had gone through it.

The corporal's uniform was torn, and altogether they were a very hard-looking party, for the scout also looked the worse for wear.

Then there was the ghastly freight carried by the Indian pony and three of the horses.

Dead bodies, no matter how well wrapped up, always have a somewhat ghastly appearance.

But Buffalo Bill little cared for that. He had a straight trail before him leading to Fort Faraway, where he was then stationed as chief of scouts under Colonel Duncan.

A glance behind him over the prairie convinced him that he had eluded the Indians who had encamped near him, and the thoroughly subdued appearance of the prisoners as they strung out before him in a long line straight across country for Fort Faraway, where the majority of them were to meet their doom, showed the scout that he need fear no trouble in that direction.

The King of the Plains had, indeed, accomplished a great feat. Single-handed, he had corralled eleven of the most desperate characters that could be found anywhere on the wild Western border.

"My single-handed round-up has been a success," he muttered to himself as he spurred his horse forward in the direction of the fort—and indeed it had been a success.

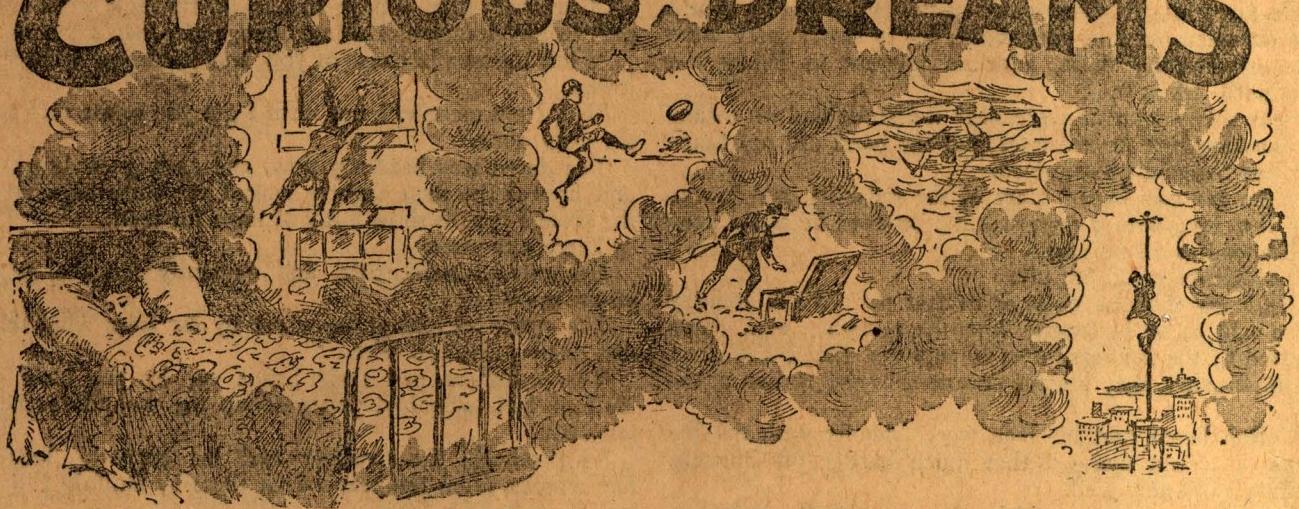
THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 86, will contain "Buffalo Bill and the Lost Miners; or, Hemmed in by Redskins."

The road that lay between the scout and the fort was not as easily traveled as he had expected. The Indians who were left behind by the scout followed hard upon his trail.

How they caught up with Buffalo Bill, how he took refuge on a hill, and in spite of the tremendous odds against him and the desperate prisoners he had in charge, fought them off until rescue came, forms part of the story. Then there is another part—and one no less interesting. It deals with the finding of a man who had been lost for years, and his rescue from the outlaw gang which held him captive.

CURIOS DREAMS



See list of prize winners in last contest.
Have your name in the next list.
The prizes are well worth striving for.
Now, boys, put on your thinking caps.
For full particulars see page 31.

Among the Boxers.

(By Percie A. Rentfro, Monticello, Ill.)

One night, about two years ago, I dreamed that I was in China fighting the Boxers. I was put on special duty and I was in the disguise of a Chinaman.

I went into one of the forbidden temples, my disguise letting me in, and while I was in there the priests were going to sacrifice a white man at the altar of Bobab-Doil. The man was kneeling, and the executioner had his sword raised to strike off his head. I could stand it no longer. I pulled off my disguise and drew my revolver, and shot. The executioner fell dead, but I was to pay dearly for my folly. When my disguise was off, they knew then that I was no Chinaman, and they pursued me.

I ran until I came to a lake. There I found a boat and rowed across. They were still following me.

Finally I thought I had eluded them, and I had a pard. I was in another temple now, and without any disguise. All at once in the temple a flood of red light that came from the ceiling, fell on me, and I stood revealed. My pard was covered with a green light that revealed him. For a moment we were too paralyzed to move, but when we did we moved rapidly and used our revolvers. We presently were out of the temple and into darkness again, and comparatively safe, when I—awoke.

A Frightful Dream.

(By Louis Friedberg, Shenandoah, Pa.)

"Help! help! Oh, Great God, save me! I am falling and will be dashed to pieces in a moment!"

Now, dear reader, to begin: I was returning one evening from the clubhouse and I took the short cut home. I had to cross a high bridge on my way. When nearly in the middle of the bridge, my foot caught on some-

thing and I lost my balance and fell, not on the bridge, but over. Down I went and I gave a shriek. I knew what mercy I would get from the jagged rocks below. My head was in a whirl, but I thought quickly. I remembered some telegraph wires halfway below the bridge. Quickly I reached out to grasp them. This was my only hope. I reached out, but I missed. I gave up then, my last hope. But all at once I was checked from my fall. My foot caught between the wires, and I was held fast. I hung there between life and death. I felt my foot slipping again. I gave a shriek and cried the words with which I began my story. But help was not at hand. I felt myself flying through midair again. I uttered a low moan and waited for the last. Looking down, I saw the jagged rocks, and my heart nearly stopped beating. I shut my eyes and, all at once, I received a heavy fall. I was lying on my back in the center of the floor, where I fell from my bed. Mother was calling me for breakfast, and I am very thankful the dream was not true.

Lost on an Air-Ship.

(By J. A. Millard, Cornellsville, Pa.)

Last night I had a bad headache and thought I would go to bed early. I soon fell asleep, and dreamed the following story:

I got on the air-ship here and we sailed for New York, and from there to England and so on, till we at length got around to the Rocky Mountains. Here I lost my balance and fell down, down, down! I thought I never would reach the earth, but at last it came. I fell into a swamp, but did not get hurt. I soon scrambled out of there and started to look for some farmer's house. I wandered around for an hour or so, and all of a sudden I found myself confronted by twenty Indians. They bound me and carried me to their camp, about one mile away. When we got within fifty yards of their camp, I

heard a girl crying. Pretty soon I saw her. She was as pretty as a picture. Of course, I felt sorry for her, but what could I do? They tied her to a stake and me by her side. Soon she fainted. The flames were now getting high about us. I knew my time had come, so gave up all hope; when, all of a sudden, three shots rang out and as many Indians fell. Now I kicked like a mad bull to get the fire away. I succeeded just as three hunters bounded into that camp. They were soon captured and burned in front of my eyes. Now I did give up all hope, for they soon had the fire going around me again. And just as one of the brutes was about to run a spear into me, I awoke to find I had been sleeping ten minutes, but I didn't sleep any more that night. The shortest dream I ever had.

A Dream of Dreams.

(By The Terror, Ogdensburg, N. Y.)

The Terror, known as such all over the beautiful little town of Tarryville, eight feet four inches in my stocking-feet, big and all muscle; feared by every one, even my most desperate enemies, and I had many; the best football player and all-around athlete in the country, and strongest and most nerviest man known, was taking an evening stroll with my most favorite friend, a man nearly as good as myself and who played right half-back on the "Tarryville Terrors" football team, while I played full-back, and to-morrow the great game was to be played on the Tarryville gridiron with the world's famous "Cuban Giants" football team. As we neared Wall street corner a tree whistled around above my head and then came down with a great thud and I lay on the sidewalk motionless and unconscious. This was the first time the drop was ever got on me by any one. When I came to I was in a large cage, made of monster tree-like bars of iron, which was set inside a large one-roomed building, while men, my enemies, were sitting around, smoking and laughing. I grappled two bars, wrenching them apart; pushed my way through, and started for an open window nearby, when a man jumped up and got between us. I grabbed him by the neck with my left hand and plugged him between the eyes with the other fist, and then let him drop unconscious. I then crawled through the window and started for the football field, as I could see the players in the distance, and it was the day of the great game. I arrived just as it was about to start. A sub. was in my place; he left and I filled it again. The Cubans kicked off to us; the l. h. b. got the ball and passed it to me. I run down the field, pushing and knocking opposing players right and left. When I reached the center, a youth, dressed all in red, rushed from the crowd, carrying a telegraph pole under his arm. He ran in front of me and dropped it on my toes. I stumbled and fell. Immediately the players piled on to me and I was forced to yell "down." We lined up, our left half-back took the ball, but was knocked down by the opposing tackle and fumbled it, letting the Cubans right guard get it and rush down the field, where he was downed by myself after a hard run, on our five-yard line. We held them for downs, got the ball, but couldn't gain an inch, so I was forced to show my kicking material. The ball was passed to me. I made a beautiful drop kick. It sailed down the field

and between the opposing team's goal posts, and we were ahead. The first half was over; score, T. T., 5; C. G., 0.

The second half began. We kicked off. Cuban Giants' full-back got the ball, but was pulled down by my famous hand immediately. We held them for downs and got the ball. They held us, forcing me to kick again. They knew I could kick well; so, as the ball was passed, the Cubans' famous tackle broke through and turned his back to me to block the kick. But as he did so a gust of wind swept across the field, carrying the ball to one side, as I was about to kick it. Missing it, I kicked him square in a very bad place. The crowd saw what they called a balloon ascension, and the poor tackle hasn't been since.

A scrub took his place, and the play worked next time, but the ball wasn't kicked far. We then lined up and kept rushing each other up and down the field the rest of the half. When time was called we were the winners by 5 to 0. The friends of the Cubans' tackle then sailed on to the field and tried to do me. They came at me from all sides. The first one I come down hard on his head and he sank, all on board going down. The next I kicked and the people saw another balloon ascension. The next I hit sideways on the jaw; he started to spin away, and is spinning still, when all of a sudden the goal post came down on my head and I went down. When I jumped up with a start to find my head between the bed and the wall, and recollecting that I had read a "Tip Top" the day before I knew how it had all happened. I then snoozed peacefully the rest of the night.

A Dream of Adventure.

(By Ward Woleslagle, Dravosburg, Pa.)

I dreamed one night that a friend of mine and I were walking along the river when we saw three hoboes, and Skiv said he was going to ask them for something to eat. He did so and they gave him a can with some tomatoes in it. He threw them on the ground, and they all jumped on him and were hitting him when I jumped in with a broom-stick and chased them off. Then one of them pulled a revolver and shot. We started to run and were going across a railroad bridge when we saw a train coming. I crawled to the edge of the ties, and was hanging on when I thought I had to let go. I did so, and when I awoke I was laying on the floor and my brother was bursting himself laughing.

A Bear Hunt.

(By Harry Lazarus, Bennington, Vt.)

This is a dream I had a few nights ago:

As I am a lover of hunting, I dreamed that I was out hunting one day. I traveled around most of the day, not seeing anything to shoot at. I laid down and was kind of dozing when I was startled by a terrible growl, and, looking up, about ten feet above me on a rock sat a large black bear, grinning at me in an awful way. He seemed to say, "What are you doing here?" A cold perspiration ran down my body and the hair on my head stood up on end.

I did not know what to do. I was so startled that I forgot I had a gun. Every time I made a move the

THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES.

bear would move, too. At last I got my brains together. I carefully took my gun and shot him. The bear tumbled down and I, thinking he was dead, ran over to him. I no more than got to him, when he jumped up and grabbed me in his huge paws, and began hugging me. He bit and scratched me all to pieces before I knew what struck me. My right hand was loose; I took out my hunting knife, that hung by my side, and buried it in the bear's heart. He gradually let go till he dropped dead, and I dropped near him. When I awoke I found the sun shining in my window, and I heard my mother calling me down to breakfast. I do not want to have another dream like that again.

A Dream that Came True.

(By Harry Lee Hatcher, Allegheny, Pa.)

There is a blacksmith shop near our house, and the blacksmith has an old iron safe in it to keep old papers and things in. I dreamed that a man that I knew blew the safe open and that I saw him, and tried to shoot him, but that the gun wasn't loaded and that he ran. Then I tried to run, but I could not. I was scared to death, and tried to run real hard, but could not move. I commenced halloaing and the man ran back and knocked me down. My mother had just slapped me to make me stop halloaing, "Help! help!" real loud. I told her what my dream was and she just laughed at me. Ten days after that, on Saturday night, my little baby brother was sick and my mother and I (my father being dead) were up waiting on it, when we heard a loud explosion. It was two o'clock in the morning and I wanted to go and see what it was, but was afraid. The first thing in the morning I got up and found out that the old safe had been blown all to pieces. The man that I dreamed did it was seen in the early part of the night, but he disappeared that night, and has never been heard of since. I never believed in dreams before, but always have since.

Disappointed.

(By Charles Newman, New York City.)

This is a dream which is absolutely true, though it may seem impossible. It is as follows:

Having gone to sleep one winter's night I dreamed that I was out on a hunting expedition, chasing a deer for about six miles. I became exhausted with running such a great distance, and I sat down to get my breath. Unconsciously, I placed my hand behind my back, when I encountered a cold object. I turned around and I found that it was a box. On opening it I found that it was filled to the brim with gold. Then all of a sudden I felt a knock on the head. I immediately dropped the box and I found myself lying on the floor near my bed. The next morning at the breakfast table, I told the story of my dream, everybody having a good laugh at my expense, but I nevertheless felt the keen disappointment.

A Hunting Dream.

(By Frank Burke, Shelburn, Ind.)

About two weeks ago I was at my friend's house for a visit and a hunt. We sat up late that night, cleaning our guns and getting ready for a hunt next day. When we

retired I had a dream of our next day's hunt. I dreamed we were up and had breakfast before it was light, and had to wait for daylight to come to start. We got in a hurry and started just as it was coming light in the east. We went about a half mile and then cut across a neighbor's barnyard, when, to my surprise, my pard told me that he saw a prairie chicken on the fence, and fired. Just then I saw one and killed it, and by that time my pard had killed a whole bunch of them, but our shells were giving out and I guess it was a good thing, for just then the farmer and his hired hand, aroused by the shots, came out with a club in each hand. The farmer's man got my pard down and was playing London bridge on him, and the farmer was mauling me with a club and telling how he would punish me for killing his Plymouth Rocks. And then they took us to jail with a log chain around our necks, and were just slamming the door, when we were awakened for breakfast.

PRIZE WINNERS.

Here are the prize winners in the contest that closed three weeks ago:

Whether you are among them or not, get into the new contest. There were hundreds who missed getting a prize by the narrowest margin. They are the boys who will have the best chance next time. If you were not in the last contest, don't let another good chance get past you.

FIRST PRIZE.

The following three boys will each receive a first-class camera and photographic outfit: Robert Laughlin, Box 91, Poquonock Bridge, Conn.; Romeo Maine, 430 Bryant street, San Francisco, Cal.; Walter Davis, Mystic, Pa.

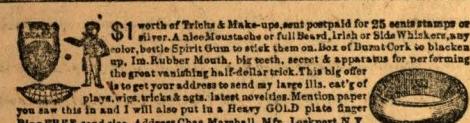
SECOND PRIZE.

The following five boys will each receive a safety hunting ax: Wm. T. Conway, 1707 Venango street, Philadelphia, Pa.; R. C. Skinner, Rumford, Rhode Island; G. Gordon, New Orleans, La.; John Andreoli, Anderson street, Rosebank, N. Y.; E. A. Field, Bath, Maine.

THIRD PRIZE.

The following five boys will each receive hunting knives: Southerland Loomis, 136 W. 38th street, New York; Earl Foley, Catlin, Illinois; George Guider, Lansing, Iowa; William Beale Neuer, 1244 W. 29th street, Indianapolis, Ind.; Leon Zeglio, Gallia, N. J.

Good luck to all of you boys. It's been a great contest, but there is a greater on foot already. You will find full particulars on page 31.



CURIOS DREAM CONTEST

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- 59—Buffalo Bill and the Masked Hussar; or, Fighting the Prairie Pirates.
- 60—Buffalo Bill's Blind; or, Running the Death Gauntlet.
- 61—Buffalo Bill and the Masked Driver; or, The Fatal Run Through Death Canyon.
- 62—Buffalo Bill's Still Hunt; or, Fighting the Robber of the Ranges.
- 63—Buffalo Bill and the Red Riders; or, The Mad Driver of the Overlands.
- 64—Buffalo Bill's Dead-Shot Pard; or, The Will-o'-the-Wisp of the Trails.
- 65—Buffalo Bill's Run-Down; or, The Red-Hand Renegade's Death.
- 66—Buffalo Bill's Red Trail; or, A Race for Ransom.
- 67—Buffalo Bill's Best Bower; or, Calling the Turn on Death Notch Dick.
- 68—Buffalo Bill and the Gold Ghouls; or, Defying Death at Elephant Rock.
- 69—Buffalo Bill's Spy Shadower; or, The Hermit of Grand Canyon.
- 70—Buffalo Bill's Secret Camp; or, Trailing the Cloven Hoofs.
- 71—Buffalo Bill's Sweepstake; or, Hunting the Paradise Gold Mine.
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- 73—Buffalo Bill's Death Charm; or, The Lady in Velvet.
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- 79—Buffalo Bill's Decoy Boys; or, The Death Rivals of the Big Horn.
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